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Verily Verily

THE AMENS OF CHRIST.

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THE AMENS OF CHRIST

BY

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Τάδε λέγει ὁ Ἀμήν.
APOC. III. 14.

EDINBURGH
DAVID DOUGLAS, 9 CASTLE STREET
MDCCCLXXIX.

'VERILY, VERILY:'

THE AMENS OF CHRIST.

'Verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.'—MATT. v. 18.

THEY to whom these words were first addressed by our Lord understood by "the law" the body of commandments and ordinances given to the Jews. But the copious illustrations of his meaning given by Christ in the exposition that follows enable us to apprehend it very clearly. He takes up one after another of the precepts in the observance of which the Jews were seeking to establish for themselves a righteousness and ground of acceptance with God, and discloses in them a fulness of meaning that had not been dreamt of. It was not intended that they who had refrained from actual murder and adultery should flatter themselves that they had religiously kept the commandments prohibiting those sins. Open transgression

is but the fruit; there is before this the tree, and before the tree there are the roots, and first of all the seed. Sin has a considerable life before it flashes itself forth in acts. "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" says the mouth sincerely at the very time the heart is hiding the seed of the future misdeed. In multitudes of instances the full efflorescence does not take place; conventionalities, rules of society, fear of consequences, hinder the development; but the sinful tendency may be in the heart all the time.

Proceeding with his illustrations, Jesus shows that the law is tending to fulfilment when an inferior or temporary expression of the Divine will is replaced by a higher expression of it. The injunction to give a writing of divorcement was subordinate to the higher law that forbade the putting away of the wife; and by parity of reason all that was temporary and special in the commandments given to the Israelites had to be superseded by that higher expression of the will of God which Christ came to give. The Jews who flattered themselves that they were righteous because they had not forsworn themselves, were to learn that the use of oaths was itself offensive to God. A Divine interpreter of the law is come among them, and he shows them that they have constantly misapprehended its scope. The Sermon on the Mount is an inspired commentary on the law, revealing its length and breadth, and showing that nothing less than absolute perfection is required of those who would be called the children of God. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect."

At a later period we find our Lord varying the words of our text thus: "Heaven and earth may pass away; my words shall not pass away." The law passes over into the words of Christ; these are the final and complete expression of the Father's will, the new version of the Divine code. The law thus embodied is an essential part of the Gospel. It is only as we know the will of God that we know God; his character expresses itself in his requirements; and if any man turns his back on the law, or gives it the cold shoulder, he is so far turned away from God. A thing this to be considered by many who seem to have little solicitude for the doing of God's will, many to whom the commandments are grievous, and whose Bible is limited to the promises. "I never knew you" is what the Judge will say to them; had they known him he would have acknowledged them.

Exceeding great and precious promises are scattered over the Gospel, but the larger part of it is preceptual; and he who would preach the Gospel must see to it that the Lord's requirements are fully set forth. It is said that the point of primary importance is that men should come to Christ, and through him be reconciled to the Father, and receive forgiveness of their sins; after that they will seek the knowledge of God's will. Yes, but in order that they may come to Christ, they must be made sensible of their need of him, they must know their sinfulness, and this they will never know till they understand better than they do the commandments of God. The Spirit of God convinceth the sinner first of his sin and then of the righteousness of Christ; and convinces him by showing

him God's holy and perfect law embodied in Christ and set at nought by the sinner. Christ's recorded words were addressed for the most part to those who had not yet come to him in faith, and consist of very much that is not invitation. They who find their complacency in the thought of fulfilled duty need to have much more of duty piled upon their consciences, till their complacency is crushed to powder and they cry out in anguish, "Wretched men that we are, who shall deliver us?" The reason why Christ's salvation has so little effect upon many who appear to have embraced it is because they do not know from what it delivers them. They have never known their absolute ruin; have not been shown the length and breadth of the Divine law; they have perhaps learned that Christ is the best of all leaders, the One most worthy to be followed; but a far more powerful consideration than this is necessary for such hearts as ours. And the fashion of the day which makes it inexpedient to say much of man's ruin and danger, and the wrath of God, tends to make it impossible that converts should know the grace of God in its magnitude and power, and effectually precludes the attainment of a high degree of consecration.

"Heaven and earth may pass away, but not one jot or tittle of the law of God unfolded in my word shall pass away." May we not infer that the Spirit of God, before the close of this dispensation, shall have exhibited in the heart and life of the believer the complete triumph of God's word, complete conformity to the word of God, the image of Christ, the perfection of sonship? Is not this that manifestation of the sons of God for which the whole

creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now? "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God and he shall be my son."

'Verily, verily I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.'—JOHN I. 52.

THESE words of our Lord were addressed to Nathanael. We have a very interesting account of the interview which proved to be of such everlasting importance to Nathanael. It is full of suggestions. Philip findeth Nathanael. Can we really know Christ and not desire that our friends should know him? What is our friendship worth if we carry not a glad report of the majesty and grace and truth that are in Christ? Philip's message was met by prejudice and unbelief. Your Jesus is of Nazareth; this is enough to show that he is not the Messiah; of all places in the world this is surely the last where we should look for a Divine deliverer. How many, even in our own day, are hindered from hearkening to the Gospel message by some similarly plausible but groundless prejudice. How many in this country (India) are unwilling to look to Christ for salvation, because his Gospel comes to them from a foreign land. But happy is that man in whom candour is stronger than prejudice; who keeps open all the doors of his mind; who will not so far favour even his most cherished opinions as to protect them from the test of new light. As the spirit of Nathanael was opposed to all guile, so it was open to all inquiry. He came and saw. "Behold an Israelite indeed,

in whom is no guile," exclaimed our Lord, thus showing that he already knew him. Of course he knew him if he was a true and guileless Israelite; for this implied that he had been born again; and Christ has had to do with every soul which has experienced this change. It was time then that Nathanael should know Christ; it was impossible that he should remain without this knowledge; the Spirit of truth is the Spirit that reveals Christ; and the providence of God is subordinate to the economy of redemption. "When thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee." What took place under the fig-tree we are not told. The other disciples doubtless asked Nathanael; but he probably declined satisfying their curiosity. There are secrets of Christian experience which the heart cannot share with others; it can only say, Go to Jesus and learn for thyself what he can impart. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. There is a private and untranslatable commerce of Christ and the individual soul; in some respects there is a separate language for every believer in his communications with the Master; he has a white stone, and in the stone a name written that no other man knoweth.

It is, however, pardonable to speculate about that which Nathanael and Jesus saw under the fig-tree. The very specific reference seems intended to challenge thought. It seems not unlikely that a key is furnished us in our Lord's closing words to Nathanael: "Ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." This is the very language in which Jacob's vision is described in Genesis xxviii. 12; it is in fact a

quotation from the Septuagint, with the words "Son of man" substituted for "it," the ladder; and conveys the idea that Christ himself is the ladder that joins earth to heaven, that stairway that connects sinful man with the throne of God; Christ, the same yesterday, to-day and for ever, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. There could have been no gracious message of God to man, no hopeful petition of man to God, if Christ had not been foreordained the Way, the Truth, the Life.

Let us then suppose that Nathanael had been, as pious Jews were then much engaged in doing, praying for God's salvation that it might be soon revealed, praying for the manifestation of the Messiah; that he had been dwelling upon the second Psalm, in which Christ is spoken of as the Son of God and as the King of Israel; that he fell asleep under the fig-tree and had a vision like that of Jacob, heaven opened and a stairway reaching to heaven, with angels ascending and descending. He wakes, and from his dream gathers assuredly that the time is at hand, and marvels in his own mind what can be the connection between the second Psalm and Jacob's vision; with extraordinary hopefulness he returns to his house, where he learns that Philip was calling for him. Philip immediately announces to him the astounding fact that he of whom Moses and the prophets had written had appeared, and that Jesus of Nazareth was he. The mention of Nazareth confounds him; but his heart is full of the glorious intimation given him under the fig-tree; so what can he do but go and see? We may supplement this supposition by another, that as a seraph cleansed the iniquity of Isaiah by a coal from the altar,

so it had been shown him that his guile was taken away by him whom that ladder prefigured. Ah, it is doubtless our guile that hinders our perception of the fulness of evidence that accompanies Jesus. A thorough truthfulness, an entire consecration to truth, is all that any man needs in order to recognise the glory of God as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ. We may confidently say, Come and see, to one whose eyes have been anointed with eye-salve, one who is not afraid of truth.

The word "hereafter" simply means "from now," "henceforth." Heaven is opened, heaven is brought near in Christ. We know heaven as we know Christ. We are in heaven as we are in Christ. Let there be faith, and heaven is opened; the throne of God is there in view; there is a perfect means of communicating with it. Take away faith, and heaven is shut; there is only this earth and imagination. And what have we in the Gospels but the rearing of this divine flight of steps? What are Christ's words and works but these successive steps? till at the last we hear him say, "Have I been so long with you, Philip, and yet hast thou not known me? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." This is eternal life, this is heaven, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; to know that the kingdom of heaven is among you.

As a matter of fact, however, we have not yet attained, neither are already perfect; have not yet attained unto the measure of the stature of a perfect man in Christ; heaven is yet above us. It is much if we can say, This is none other than the gate of heaven, as we pitch our tents here

and there amid the luminous records of the Gospel, and catch new glimpses of Divine glory beaming from the person of Jesus.

'Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.'
MATT. VI. 2, 5, 16.

THEY have the reward which they seek. They seek glory of men, and they obtain it. What distinguishes the case referred to by our Lord is that the parties sought to win honour from men by acts of piety. Some seek worldly honour by means of wealth; some by valour, knowledge, skill; and some seek it by religion. The great desire of these is to be thought holy men, given to fasting and prayer, and abounding in alms. Men have not the power to read the heart; it is not therefore necessary, to win their praise, that pure and undefiled religion should be enshrined in a man's heart; it is only necessary that he should be seen doing those things which are commonly regarded as expressive of true piety, and that the things which are not quite consistent with such a profession should be kept out of sight. A play-actor is for the most part known only as he appears on the stage; the world is invited to see his acting, but not to see his private life; his reputation rests upon his public exhibitions. So the man who seeks a religious reputation must aim to have attention fixed exclusively upon those things in him which seem indicative of piety, and to have a veil drawn carefully over the rest.

All the world has agreed in this day to pronounce a sentence of utter condemnation on hypocrisy; and it is thought that there is very much less of it at present than

there was formerly. If such a happy change has actually taken place, the reason must be either that human nature has grown better, or that the world is less disposed to reward a religious profession than it once was. Human nature is essentially what it has been. There is reason to believe that men (in Europe and America) are not so ready to honour a religious profession as they once were. Still, it is evident enough that the pursuit of honour in this way *pays;* a religious reputation is considered desirable by a great many, and is eagerly and industriously sought after. Perhaps, instead of sending our curious gaze far and wide in search of such, it may not be amiss to interrogate *ourselves* as to the motives for our various religious acts. It is not impossible that some among us who enjoy a reputation for piety and devotedness may have made this reputation the great object of their solicitude.

How plausible is a train of thought like the following: 'A religious reputation will enable me to advance the cause of religion very greatly among many who otherwise would be little likely to entertain favourable views of it; it will give me influence, and through this influence religion will gain the attention of many; there will result a measure of concession to its claims greater than could have been hoped for under other circumstances.' Yes, but there is a great snare in all this. Let us suppose that a man, simply for the greater glory of God, should lay himself out to win such a prominent and influential religious position; he will be obliged to have his attention fixed upon the minds of men and upon the springs by which they are governed, and very warily to regulate his conduct so that he may not

destroy his prospects by incurring their displeasure. In various ways this will harm him. The mind is naturally affected by that to which it gives its chief attention; if its attention is given to the sentiments and aims and motives that ordinarily govern men, the unworthy character of these will exercise a debasing influence upon it. But the chief injury will be wrought negatively. The grand secret of all religious progress is to have the attention supremely and habitually given to the glorious character of God as it presents itself to us in Christ; to have an eye simply to his glory; to be swayed by the motives and considerations presented in his word; to be guided by the Holy Ghost *into all truth.* It is truth, not falsehood, that is to have our attention. "If I yet please men," says Paul, "how can I please God?" If I seek the honour which cometh from man, how shall I have that which cometh from God only? Beware of men, says Christ to his disciples.

God sometimes gives his servants honour among men. But it is for God to give it, not for us to seek it. Our one study should be, to be approved of God. Moses, in the early part of his life, sought to commend himself to the Israelites, as their appointed liberator; but failed signally, and was sent into exile and isolation for forty years; then when he was loath to believe that he was the man for this great work, God sent him with the needed credentials. God generally reduces his instruments to nothingness, before he puts his power upon them.

If suddenly, on the Lord's day, all were eliminated from our churches who have been drawn there by a desire to be seen of men, or in search of something that God has not

promised them, what vast unoccupied Saharas would take the place of well-dressed worshippers! If they come there because people of their own position are there, if they come because a crowd is pleasanter than solitude, if they come to see and to be seen, if they come for the music, if they come for entertainment in any form, they will generally obtain their reward.

And they who contribute to charitable and religious funds from a desire to be thought liberal, or from a desire to be thought wealthy, generally obtain that which they seek. And they who do it because they are ashamed not to do it, afraid to be thought illiberal or unsympathetic, obtain what they seek; but what a great pity that they should know nothing of the infinitely better rewards that God gives!

Is it not an unspeakable insult to God that such an overweening importance should be attached to the wretched judgments of sinful men in the matter of religion, and the magnificent invitations and promises of God be disregarded? The same care, the same pains, the same sacrifices, the same perseverance that are shown in seeking a religious reputation among men, God asks of thee, asks from the cross of Christ, asks with a crown of righteousness in his hand, with a charter of glory, honour, and immortality, and asks in vain. If the poor reward thou seekest content thee, take it and go; and when, in the last day, with thy honour-giving multitude, thou art excluded from the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, depart without murmuring, remembering that thou hast had thy good thing, hast for a little hour walked among men as a man of piety. Verily, thou shalt have had thy reward.

'Verily, Verily I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.'—JOHN v. 19.

CHRIST had incurred the displeasure of the leading men among the Jews at Jerusalem, by healing the impotent man on the Sabbath. The real offence was in healing him at all, thus giving evidence of a Divine power attendant on his word; but if the miracle had not been wrought on the Sabbath they would have had no excuse for their opposition. There was, however, a special bitterness in the thought that the miracle told strongly against their conception of the Sabbath, and made very light of the miserable righteousness which they had been accumulating by an excessive strictness in externals.

At first blush the words we have cited seem to intimate that Christ followed the Father in the doing of certain works; he saw the Father doing them, and then he did like them. But looking at the entire context, it is evident that the truth set forth is the identity of the Father and the Son, so that the works of Christ were really the works of God. He says to the Jews, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." They understood him as making himself equal with God. A few chapters on he tells them plainly, "I and my Father are one."

The great Teacher, as he used not a dead language, nor a language more perfect than that which was spoken by the people whom he addressed, so he ever had regard in his

instructions to their mental calibre, their measure of intelligence. Jehovah, the Lord of Hosts, whom the Old Testament had made known to him, dwelt on high in majesty unapproachable; the Lord their God was one God; woe unto the man or angel who should presume to assert power or authority like that of God! Jesus of Nazareth was in the midst of them as a man; they could see, hear, handle him; a veritable man clothed in a body like their own. He may be a sinless man, but that is a point to be slowly ascertained. Now let Christ begin his ministry by asserting that in him is all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; the thought would naturally arise, even in the breasts of good men, that such an assumption is an outrage upon the glory of the invisible God, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain. Thus did not Christ. He makes constant references to the Father on high; speaks of himself as "the sent of God;" is content that men should recognise him as a divinely commissioned envoy, conveying the words of God. Nevertheless his mission requires that he should be at last known as God manifest in the flesh; that men should see the very character and mind and being of the blessed God, in his words and works and sufferings, in his entire life and death. Let us then bear in mind, as we read the Gospels, that our Lord has to guard against the readiness to misapprehend that of which we have spoken, and to preserve in the minds of his hearers the necessary interval between the invisible Father and the flesh-inhabiting Son; and on the other hand, that he has to teach men to see in him the full revelation of the Godhead, and we shall find the solution of many of the difficulties presented by his successive teachings.

For instance, Christ does not, during his ministry, encourage men to prostrate themselves before him. On one occasion the mother of James and John casts herself at his feet with a petition which is not granted; Peter once does the same, in a moment of impulse; the young ruler did it; but the thing is quite exceptional; the disciples have no such way of approaching him, and even publicans and sinners sit and eat with him. His flesh was a veil between them and the indwelling Godhead, and needed to be rent upon the cross, that the Divine glory might be fully revealed. "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice because I said, I go unto the Father; for my Father is greater than I." "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

'I can of mine own self do nothing: you can. What you do reveals simply your own character, betrays your own perverted will. You follow simply your own impulses, without regard to the will of God. But I do nothing without a conviction that it is the Father's will. I will to do that only which he wills. It was because I was conscious at every step that the Father went with me, that I went to the pool of Bethesda; if I spoke, it was because the Father gave me the words; and that my words were those of the Father is evident from the result,—the man was made whole. Thus am I proclaimed to be the Son of God. The Son can do nothing of himself, only what he seeth the Father do.'

Men find pleasure in magnifying the importance and value of their own individual nature; they also find complacency in whatever confers a higher dignity upon human nature. So far as they can they persuade themselves that they are, individually, heroes, and they compensate them-

selves for what they cannot find in their own natures by the worship of the world's heroes. What a man can do of himself, without help from without, without help from above, that determines the measure of his greatness. How indeed shall they idolise a man if he is not the artificer of his own character and fortunes? The self-made man is the hero. And men have lately had the good fortune to find a new hero, even Christ. Is he not a self-made man? Where did he get his character and his wonderful teachings and his unparalleled power over humanity? Did he get wisdom from the Egyptians or Greeks? nobility from the Romans? did the Jews mould and train him in their schools? Did he learn refinement in the courts of princes? self-denial among fishermen? No, we are frankly told by our hero-worshippers; Jesus, by virtue of his own inherent powers, his felicitous organisation, made for himself, unaided of men, a position above all men; and in him we see what this humanity of ours is capable of, and glory in it accordingly.

It is very true that Christ owed nothing to mankind. But what does Christ tell us of himself? "I can of mine own self do nothing; why callest thou me good? there is none good save one, that is, God; the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works." Hero-worship is at an end when a man truly knows Christ. We shall to all eternity adore the Lamb that was slain; but it is God thus revealed whom we shall thus adore.

"The victory which overcometh the world" is the faith that enables us to offer up moment by moment our whole being to God, that he may dwell in us, reign in us, use us,

be manifest in us. Christian growth is not in adding strength to strength, but in knowing that man is nothing apart from God, and was only created for a vital union with God, and is redeemed by Christ from his own selfness, that he may be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

Let us then take heed how we read the Gospels. May we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. In everything recorded of the Saviour let us see the manifestation of God; for Christ of his own self did nothing.

'Verily, verily I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.'—JOHN v. 24.

THE Greek word here rendered "condemnation" is rendered "judgment" in verses 22, 27, and 30, and "damnation" in 29. The word has the force of "a condemnatory sentence" either against persons or their moral acts and opinions. In verse 29 it is opposed, as here, to life. In the original these classes are both in the present tense: "hath life" and "cometh not into condemnation."

Do you believe that Christ is the Sent of God? that his words are the message of God? that his sayings are truth? The only alternative is to believe him a liar. Conscience compels you to start back with affright from such a position. If ever there was a truth-teller on this earth, Christ was he. Then observe what things are sealed and made for ever sure by this "verily, verily." Christ is the Life-giver of humanity. Men are without life; they are under condemnation; they

are dead; they remain so until the word of God spoken by Jesus reaches their heart, is apprehended and embraced by faith; they whose faith thus appropriates the life-giving word have already everlasting life, and are no more exposed to wrath; they who continue in unbelief, excluding the word from their heart, are under condemnation, and shall continue so to be. For my word, says Christ elsewhere, shall judge them at the last day; the very word rejected by them, the everlasting Gospel; no higher truth than this shall give them hope in the judgment-day; for there is no higher truth.

If the word of Christ, received by faith, is alone life-giving, then verily, verily, it is a great and terrible delusion to believe that the baptism of an unconscious infant regenerates. To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to as many as believe on his name. "Born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth for ever." Is thy baptism the foundation of thy hope? Christ bids thee make haste to abandon it, and seek with all thy heart the word of life. Is thy hope sustained by the work of "a priest" transforming bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ? Not the very body and blood of Christ, much less the forgery of it, can give life. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth."

Do you profess to believe on Him that sent Christ into the world? Do you say, This sufficeth us; it matters little about the word of Christ? God sending his Son to you puts you to the proof; if you have faith, if you know God, you will joyfully recognise his testimony and submit your-

self to it fully. The Jews professed to know the Father; yet turned away from the Father incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, and showed that there was no being for whom they had a greater hatred. "Not this man, but Barabbas." "He that hateth me hateth my Father also." "Neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whom the Son shall reveal him."

It is natural for men to look forward to the judgment-day, for the word that shall give them everlasting life. They hope then to hear with rapture the words, Thy sins are forgiven thee, enter into life, be numbered among the redeemed. Alas for those who wait till then to hear the words of absolution from the lips of God. God giveth us everlasting life in the Gospel. We must find there or nowhere, we must now find there or never, the words, Thy sins are forgiven thee; eternal life is thine. We are saved by faith, the faith that now appropriates the Gospel-offered life; he that heareth and believeth hath everlasting life.

He is not a believing hearer of the word who chooses among Christ's words the more palatable and neglects the rest. This is faith in ourself; in our own judgment; it places Christ at our own bar, and reduces him from the position of infallibility to the level of fallible men. Will the great enemy of hypocrisy thank thee for kindly accepting some of his words, and professing to be his disciple while discarding as faulty many of the words which he brought from the Father? He will spue thy offering out of his mouth. Wherein dost thou differ from Judas, but in the persistency of thy lie?

I turn to thee, humble and diffident believer. Thou wouldst not for the world reject any word of Christ, but staggerest at the thought that the evidence of God's acceptance of thee is to be found in thy acceptance of Christ's word. It seems to thee that there must be something beside the word, to authorise thy assurance that thou hast life. But if there is anything beside the word, then it is not by faith thou art saved. The Physician says, This very drug shall be health to thee; the patient answers, Surely not this alone, give me somewhat else. Yes, this alone: "he that believeth on me hath everlasting life; him that cometh to me I shall in no wise cast out; thy sins are forgiven thee." Take this word into thy heart, and know that thou hast life; no matter though thy feelings withhold their testimony, no matter though Satan clamour wildly; only believe; Christ's word in thee is life. Believe in the dark, and Christ shall give thee life. The word that has found entrance will keep the door of thy heart opened for the other words of the Gospel to come in; and God in heaven will hear the prayers vitalised by this faith. There is evidence that goes before faith, and there is evidence that follows after. The evidence that goes before is out of thee, is in the Gospel and in its achievements in the world; sequent evidence shall appear, when the Spirit willeth, in thy changed nature.

'Verily, verily I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live.'—JOHN v. 25.

A REFERENCE to the verse preceding, dwelt upon in our last, shows that it is the spiritually dead who are here spoken of; the life to be communicated by the voice of the Son of God is life in the true sense, the high sense, everlasting life, life corresponding to his own. Unforgiven sin is death; for it is alienation from God, in whom alone is life. Against this "verily, verily"—that man is dead in trespasses and sins, and necessarily and naturally incapable of conquering life for himself,—the armies of the present day are arrayed under the leadership of many. This may be said to be the great issue between the Bible and Modern Thought. All other differences will easily be composed, when this fundamental question of man's condition is settled. Unhappily, modern society does not seem to be making much progress in the direction of a solution. For the world is daily making many intellectual conquests; solving many scientific problems; dissipating many mysteries; vastly enlarging the area of human knowledge; changing the face of the earth; and has only so much time to spare from its labours as is needed for the work of self-glorification. If it was a hard matter for the Laodicean Christians to learn that they were poor, and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked, when they thought themselves rich and increased in goods and needing nothing,

how vastly more difficult must it be for this wisest of generations to receive the testimony of Christ that it is spiritually dead and helplessly alienated from God!

Men who have daily experience of the power of well-applied thought to master, in every other department of knowledge, new and important truths, and to discover, in heaven and on earth, in the stellar worlds and in a drop of water, wonders that had been hidden from the foundation of the world, are at a loss to understand why they should not be competent to determine of themselves what pure and undefiled religion is, to sit in judgment upon the Bible, and to create a theology which their forefathers knew not. How is it that they can improve on everything else that has come down from antiquity, and cannot improve upon Christianity? Why should the superior acumen that enables us to pronounce decisively as to the plans and errors of other ancient works, fail us when we turn to the writings of the apostles and prophets? We receive the wise thoughts of former days as seeds into our minds, and lo, they germinate abundantly; what should hinder that we should in like manner carry to a higher development the thoughts of God, of salvation, of the life to come, that were formerly propounded? To these questions men are impatient of any but one answer, and that is one that concedes to them the power of ascertaining religious truth for themselves.

They are deceived by a false analogy. There is a difference between religious truth and other truth; other truth does not come to them for the purpose of spoiling them of what they hold most dear; it does not come to humble them and to shame them. In all their scientific

attainments they have self-complacency. The discoveries they make in geology, astronomy, ethnology or natural philosophy, do not make known to them any moral delinquencies or any painful duties. It is a fact of which they willingly are ignorant, that the conscience stubbornly resists all enlightenment that is calculated to rob it of its peace, and substitute self-condemnation for self-complacency. If the analysis of the solar spectrum should begin to show a man that he was some thousands of pounds in debt, or that he had committed some state-prison offence, that analysis would quickly be looked at with suspicion, and very different results be soon obtained; violet would become yellow, and black lines would disappear.

Before a man can receive the life that the Son of God has to offer he must receive the assurance of the Bible that sin is death, and its chains as binding on the soul as those of physical death are on the exanimate body. "After that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." The Gospel is reputed foolishness because it makes nothing of man's wisdom, and declares that the Babel of science can never reach heaven. The wisest and the meanest of mankind must sit on the same bench to be taught the way of salvation. Except we become as little children we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. See this whole subject thoroughly treated in the first three chapters of the First Epistle to the Corinthians.

The hour cometh. It now is. Even when our Lord was on the earth, the word spoken by him was not without a life-giving power. Some took up their cross and followed

him, sacrificing their reputation for wisdom, and becoming fools in the estimation of men that they might have the wisdom from above which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, without partiality and without hypocrisy, full of mercy and good fruits. And now too we are not without examples of this power of the Spirit-driven word to convince of sin and reveal the righteousness of Christ. And the redeemed of these eighteen centuries, how great a cloud of witnesses they are, testifying from realms of everlasting blessedness that the word of Christ maketh wise unto salvation. Yes, no man need wait for the hour to come, that he may experience the saving power of Christ's word. This very hour of thy sin and need is the hour when salvation is knocking at the door of thy heart, by the word of the Son of God. Wait not for that word to gather strength; it is the very word that caused light to shine out of darkness; that upholdeth all things; that broke the proud heart of Saul of Tarsus, of John Newton, and of thousands like them; it will never be diviner than it now is. But the seed may not show its strength till it is embraced by the soil; it is only in the lungs that air will be life to thee; take unto thee in faith the word of Christ, and thou shalt have experience that this is no other than the word of the Son of God, no other than the Word that was with God and is God.

'Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.'—MATT. VIII. 10.

LET us consider the special features of this faith which obtained such high commendation.

This centurion was no Jew, but a Roman, sometime an idolater, who had been enabled by his intercourse with the Jews to perceive that there was with them a true revelation of the mind of God. If the Jews themselves imperfectly understood the teaching of the Old Testament concerning the promised Messiah, he would naturally understand it still less. If there were difficulties in the way of an exercise of faith in Christ on the part of the Jews, there would be a greater in his instance. They to whom he was indebted for his partial knowledge of revealed truth did not refer him to Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah; but even while they spoke of his wonderful works, disfavoured his claims and denied his Messiahship. When we owe all the light we have to a teacher or a set of teachers, a denomination, an author, how very difficult it is to stop short and refuse to receive their testimony on some vital point lying just beyond the truth we have received. They who have guided us so far seem to have purchased the privilege of controlling our judgments, and of shutting the door against rival preachers.

There are many of the generation just coming forward in India, who have received an education, the value of which will naturally seem immense, inasmuch as it has freed their minds from the superstitions and errors of their forefathers, made them acquainted with the true system of the universe, hindered them from giving their confidence to the imaginary deities of Hinduism, or devoting their time to the observance of silly and pernicious rites. They have learned that God is one, unchangeable, self-existent, omniscient, omnipotent, a spirit, and absolutely sufficient unto himself. All very good. But how very natural that they should listen,

when the instructors, to whom they owe so much, tell them, directly or indirectly, that God is too great to make a special manifestation of himself, or to hear the prayers of man; at all events, that no Mediator is necessary; that the light that is in us is sufficient for our guidance; that the consequences of sin die with us. Or let us suppose that their European teachers say nothing, intimate nothing, with regard to these matters of profound concern; they simply leave it to be gathered from the exclusive and absorbing interest that the things which belong not to the domain of revelation have for them, that they regard the doctrines taught by Christ's evangelists as of little consequence; how very natural that their pupils should turn from those doctrines with disdain. Thus for one who openly advocates and urges in India the claims of Christ the Saviour upon the confidence of men, there are many who, designedly or undesignedly, are exerting a contrary influence.

We may trace in some other features an analogy between the centurion of Capernaum and the theists of modern India. If we had only the account in Matthew, we should suppose that the centurion came in person to Christ. But the other evangelists give the narrative with more detail, and inform us that he did not come in person; he thought himself not worthy; he was not a Jew, and thought his foreign birth might prejudice the success of his suit; he deputed certain elders of the Jews, who knew his regard for Judaism, to carry his suit to Jesus. He had, it would appear, never seen Jesus. He had heard of him and his wonderful works and his beneficence; he had not come in personal contact

with him. He accordingly well represented the Gentile world. And this was one reason why our Lord called special attention to his faith. This one Roman, breaking through the many barriers of unbelief, and laying hold by faith upon his Divine power and grace, simply because of what he had heard of him, stood before his mind's eye as the representative of many myriads who from the East, the West, the North, the South, should afterwards believe on him through the preaching of the Gospel.

The centurion might have reasoned thus :—

'There are priests, elders, scribes well acquainted with the inspired records, and who must be far more competent than the ignorant masses who know not the law, to decide as to the claims of Jesus, and they almost all disallow these claims. Shall I then, a stranger, and only lately brought out of deepest darkness, be influenced by the report of the untaught multitude and go after this Nazarene?'

But this Roman was divinely taught, and reasoned very differently. Observe, he *reasoned;* his faith was not the blind, inexplicable thing that some call faith. He said: 'The men who have told me of Christ's miracles are men who are just as competent to judge of the things they report as the most learned men would be. They know as well as any when a man is blind and when he sees; when lame men are made to walk; when a dead man is restored to life; when thousands feast on a few loaves; when lepers are cleansed and demoniacs are healed; when a storm rages and when it ceases; and when these things are done by a mere word. He who can do such things can do anything. As for his coming to my house to heal my servant, it is

unnecessary; the power that he exerts can just as well be exerted at a distance; let him speak and it shall be done. As for the idea that he works by means of Beelzebub, the thing is proved absurd in the very uttering; he is engaged in destroying the works of the devil. He seeks nothing from men; he seeks to bestow favours, taking nothing in return. In all things he is essentially different from sinful men. I will trust in him, and I will seek his help on behalf of my poor sick servant.'

Faith in the Lord Jesus is not always found where we should naturally look for it; among those who have enjoyed the advantages attendant upon the knowledge of the Gospel; who are most familiar with its promises and invitations. Those whom we should have thought least likely to come to the knowledge of the truth often outstrip those whose advantages were greatest. We need not wait for others to go before us in this path, because they have been specially favoured. If the word of Christ has come to us at all, we have only to embrace it in faith, and we shall possibly be in as good a position to glorify God as any. While there are thousands of Europeans who are not obedient to the Gospel, a native of India may by faith so enter into fellowship with the Lord Jesus as to be an instrument in God's hand, more powerful than they all, for the regeneration of India. "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

In true faith we see the combination of humility and boldness. This centurion thought himself not worthy that Jesus should come under his roof; and not worthy to approach Jesus in person. His mind was divested of all

thoughts of his own worthiness. But this did not hinder him from asking or expecting great things. Other people said that Jesus must come to his servant in order to heal him, and assured him that it was a mistake to imagine that Christ would heal him at a distance. But he reasoned that Christ's power was unlimited power, and that his kindness and condescension were co-ordinate with his power. If he had been a mere imitator, one that went with the multitude, one that dared not think for himself, he would not have ventured on this act of faith. He had already broken the trammels of class and country and creed, by acknowledging the Jews to be God's people, and by building for them a synagogue; and in thus obeying conscience he obtained increased moral power; he finds his way to Christ, the light of the world.

'Verily, verily I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.'—JOHN VI. 26.

THE miracle of the multiplication of loaves was wrought to satisfy the need of the people. They had been fasting some time; it would be difficult for them to get food for themselves; Jesus, therefore, with power from on high, spread for them a repast in the wilderness. Was he simply intent on satisfying their hunger? Had he regard only to their physical need? Had this been the only object in view, the providence of God would so have arranged matters that they should have been fed without a miracle, just as

it now provides for the sustenance of similar multitudes all over the world. But the miracle was full of significance; its scope was sublime; it was freighted with that which should convey blessings for a lifetime, for eternity, to the soul.

I. It was divinely given. The power and grace of God were directly concerned in its production. He that said Let there be light, and there was light, said, Let the five loaves in this basket be more than sufficient for the appetite of these assembled thousands. It was as though angels had sped from the very throne of God with the bread which they required. Through the operation of sin, Nature has become a screen between God and men; they take and eat the good things with which the world abounds without understanding that they are at the banquet-table of God, that he has knowledge of them and of their need, and is the Giver of these good things. What is found is valued simply for what it is in itself, for the help and pleasure it briefly ministers, and not as a special token of a heavenly Father's love. But what these Galileans had all their life failed to recognise, the miraculously multiplied loaves should have shown them. Now, if never before, the bread in their hands should signify to them the love of God, should as it were constrain them to see a door opened in heaven, with the God of all grace looking down and saying, In me is all thou needest; my people shall be satisfied with my goodness. A rose sent to you from the sovereign, a mere rose, would it not be priceless as signifying to you that the giver is your friend, his power at your service, his treasures plighted for your pleasure? The Lord Jesus might well

have thought in himself as he multiplied the loaves, Now surely I shall get a victory over this Nature that has so long been intercepting the glory of God and hindering these creatures of his, these pensioners of his, from recognising the kindly hand Divine that opens daily to satisfy them.

II. The miracle bore testimony to Christ. Him God the Father sealed by means of it, declaring unambiguously, This is my beloved Son, commissioned to interpret all my mind to you, laden with the riches of my grace, clothed with salvation; his words are my words, and should be to you more precious than thousands of gold and silver. Hear and your soul shall live. Was it possible for men to eat *this* bread and not look unto Jesus, not see the glory of God shining in his face, not hunger and thirst with intensest desire for every word that should fall from his lips? Did not every mouthful that they ate take possession of them for Christ, and bind them to him by a mystical but vital, indissoluble bond, even as the members are bound to the head? Are they not now consecrated to him by far more than an external and visible sign and symbol, even by his signature in the very fountains of their being? Of what can they speak as they sit there by fifties? shall it be of the mere bread, satisfying their bodily hunger? Shall we not hear one say to another: How wonderful is this Jesus! nothing is impossible to him; with him is all the power of God; he speaks and it is done; how fearfully have we slighted the words that fell from him! surely every word of his must have an everlasting importance; what sinners we must be! what a blessed thing that he is full of grace, and does not frown upon us! let us listen diligently to every

word that he utters, and obey it for our life ; henceforth know nothing but Jesus Christ, and deem it a greater honour to suffer privation, ignominy, cruel injury in his name, than to be the most exalted of men without him.

We hearken, but we do not hear them thus speaking to one another. They find much to wonder at ; they think it would be a fine thing to have Jesus for their king ; but the thought in their mind is that as a king provides sumptuously for his courtiers, so he should enrich and honour them.

Jesus saw that this was all that was in their minds when they gathered around with acclamations, wishing to make him king of the Jews, there and then. It was very much as when the Tempter had shown him from an exceeding high mountain the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them. Jesus sent them away, sent the disciples too away, and went into the woods to weep in the bosom of his heavenly Father.

Was that a peculiar race ? Has that generation passed away ? Is it not, morally, still existing ? Are there not in Christendom, are there not among us, multitudes who receive the Gospel as those Galileans received the miraculous bread, only to inquire how they can be helped by it to a comfortable and honourable provision here below ?

At the present day, almost everywhere, the office of a minister of Christ means a competency. It often means more ; it means a position in society ; the respect of the gentry, the reverence of the poor ; in some instances, wealth. Hundreds and thousands come forward every year to the place of embarkation for the voyage of life, to the point where they must decide upon a career, a profession ; Law,

Medicine, Literature, the Navy, Commerce, Engineering, Art, "the Church," are before them; and many, we have reason to fear, are helped to make election of this last, by the fact that it is to give them advantages of a temporal nature,—an honourable place in society, ease, a good income. We know what ministry means in Christ's estimation; he came not to be ministered unto but to minister; he was among us as one that serveth; and the servant of Christ is not greater than his Lord. If any man serve me, let him follow me; let him take up his cross, forsaking all that he hath, and follow me.

But the origin of the evil lies further back. Those who come forward to enter the ministry are as the church is. Their piety bears a certain proportion to the piety of the body to which they belong. The view of discipleship determines the view of the ministry. Too many join themselves to the great body of professing Christians, with views not essentially different from those which brought the Jews in Capernaum to Jesus. They are largely influenced by considerations that relate to this life. They have no thought of repudiating the world, its service, its honours, its pleasures. They would shudder at the thought of breaking with the world. The incidental advantages of professing religion (if that can be called a profession of religion which has the sanction of the world) are all that they look at.

Surely this must be revolting to Christ in a high degree. How greatly was he displeased when a man came with a complaint against his brother about some miserable inheritance; to Christ who had come from heaven to tell us of an inheritance unfading and sublime in the heavens.

The Gospel offers men a key of paradise; they take it with a smirk of complacency, thinking to sell it for old silver.

'Verily, verily I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven, but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.'—John vi. 32, 33.

The children of Israel had the singular privilege of gathering and eating daily food which had been miraculously supplied. There is a greater and more interesting display of the perfections of God in the elaborate processes by which he ordinarily supplies man with food. What can be more marvellous, more improbable we might say, than that seeds thrown away over the ground and left to be covered by the earth, should die and get new life, and extract food from the surrounding soil, and get strength to lift themselves into day-light, and there enter into intimate relations with the sun, moon, and stars, with light and heat, darkness and cold, with the distant seas through the clouds, with rain and dew, and go through many magical transformations, and finally, having been dealt with by man's skill and force, by the sickle, the flail, the mill, the kneading trough, the oven, should become fitted for the palate, the digestive powers, the innumerable physiological necessities of man? When the bread is laid upon your table, it is as though all the ministries of nature, the powers of the universe, clapped

their hands and exclaimed, We have schemed and consulted, and watched and toiled, and fought and suffered, and have won for you this fruit of our co-operation and devotion; and now we go to bring you forward that which is behind. But man, the blindest of the blind, the deafest of the deaf, hears not a word of all this, gives not a thought to the wonderful series of transformations that culminated in the loaf; with indifference, perhaps with contempt, with vexation, and a sense of injustice, he eats it and lets it give him life. Life? well, what he calls life; his physical powers are recruited. Nature, with groans and with a downcast countenance, retraces her steps, wondering how long her pains will be thrown away upon this sinner, this rebel. This which we have called a greater and more interesting display of the perfections of God, is so to one who knows and loves God, and is led by the Spirit of God; but to the carnal, to men under the influence of their fleshly and depraved nature, the immediate and miraculous production of anything speaks a thousand-fold more strongly of the presence and power of God. In the recovery of a lost world nature is impotent; she could not keep from falling, much less can she recover; she could not defend from blindness, much less can she restore the sight.

The words above, stamped with Christ's verily, verily, signify this: 'Moses gave you bread from heaven, in a sense, an inferior sense; but it did not give you life, did not enable you to live for ever, did not take away the evil of your nature; your fathers (whom you resemble) left their carcasses in the wilderness; my Father giveth you, in

me, the true bread from heaven, the bread of God, which giveth life unto the world. And all that Moses gave to you, all whereby you were made to differ from other nations, the words, the commandments which he brought to you from Mount Sinai, the Mosaic institutions, circumcision, the temple, the altar, the ceremonial and moral law, have these given you life? They are and have been "a ministration of condemnation," bringing out the evidence of your deep depravity, your utter inability to serve God acceptably, your absolute need of an atoning Messiah. In the Scriptures you think you have eternal life; but it is only as they testify of me that they point you out the way of life; and this way you will not pursue; you will not come unto me that you might have life. I am the bread of life, the bread which giveth true life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.'

Man knows not the life from whence he has fallen, and is therefore incapable of knowing the greatness of his fall. This is the radical cause of his inability to understand the word of God. The same incompetency to understand which was manifested by the Jews of Capernaum in connection with this discourse of Christ, is common to men who read the Bible with unchanged hearts. The life from which man has fallen, and to which Christ would restore him, is a life of intimate union and fellowship with God, a life of the most perfect amity between the creature and the Creator, between the believer and his Redeemer, in which all the resources of the Godhead wait perpetually upon the needs of the reconciled sinner. Man knows himself in his

relations to the world; knows himself as a physical, moral, intellectual being; and does not dream that there is a life far above all this, a spiritual life with God, a heavenly life. The Jews tried to interpret Christ's words by the only experiences they had, the experiences of the lower life, and could make nothing of them. If only they had deeply felt this inability, and attributed the darkness not to his words but to their own thoughts, they would have come to Him and partaken of the life from heaven.

These Jews wished to attach themselves to Christ in such a sense that he should ever be ready to exert his miraculous power in their behalf, and they would thus be secured against hunger and thirst all their days, and be as well off as the rich man who said to his soul, Soul, take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry, thou hast much goods laid up for many days. We have but to carry over this idea into the higher life, and we see what Christ means by engaging to secure the believer against hunger and thirst. He does not take away the appetite; but he satisfies it and shows us that he always will satisfy it, and that his own inexhaustible fulness is ours; of his wisdom and knowledge, of his grace and advocacy, of his strength and guidance, of his holiness and truth we may always avail ourselves without stint. He himself is our bread of life. The Giver gives himself. All things are yours; for Christ is yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

'Verily, verily I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.'—JOHN VI. 47.

CHRIST is the bread of life come down from heaven to give life to the world; to restore to men what Adam lost. He is the Living One; in him is life; about him are the dead, the men of all nations and all ages; how is the life that is in him to be communicated unto them? There is something to be done by him that this life from heaven may be available for them; and there is something to be done by them that they may actually obtain it. Christ's discourse, contained in this chapter, expository as it is of the miracle of the loaves, furnishes abundant information on these two points. It was needful that Christ, having come into this world and set forth his character in works and words, should die for the sins of men on the cross, as it is necessary that bread, in order to become food, should be broken. And it was needful that the sinner should appropriate the virtue of Christ's death; how? by believing on him.

The minds of men are so little accustomed to the contemplation of spiritual truth, they are naturally so unconversant with what belongs to spiritual life, that when the things relating to this life are stated to them, no matter how simply, their tendency is to regard the expressions used as referring to mysteries, to be contemplated reverentially afar off, without any clear idea of what they mean. And as faith is represented as the one grand condition on their part, whereby everlasting life becomes their portion, they are disposed to regard it as indicative of some mysterious

exercise or attitude of their nature, some uncomprehended process within them, which it would be presumption to attempt clearly to understand, and with which consciousness has not much to do. And so with the word "life;" it has some mystic sense, some mysterious laws, and it is no reproach to us if we do not understand its nature and conditions. For does not the New Testament speak much of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven? in this life must we not necessarily remain ignorant of the processes by which God carries on his work in our spirits?

Ah, what a pity that the expressions of Scripture were not examined more carefully! Mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are spoken of, but they are mysteries revealed. Things long hidden, even from the foundation of the world to the days of Christ, have been cleared up, brought to light, by the Gospel and its epistolary comments, through the power of the Holy Ghost. Blessed are your eyes, for ye see things which kings and prophets in vain desired to see. Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, heart hath not conceived the things which God hath prepared for them that love him,—but God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit. The veil upon the minds of men in the former generation is done away in Christ. And again, the great things of the kingdom of God are mysteries to those who have not a true faith in Christ. Unto you it is given to know them, says Christ to all sincere inquirers; but to those who are not, the parables remain parables, unsolved problems, letter, not spirit. "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the Gospel should shine unto them." "Ye have an unction

from the Holy One, and know all things." And it is not only the privilege, it is the bounden duty of the believer, to seek to get the Bible entirely open ; to address himself to the study of all its mysteries with the strong conviction that the mind of the Spirit is that he should understand them all. Only let him take good heed that he does not forsake or go beyond the guidance of the Spirit in this pursuit; does not allow his imagination to get the better of him; does not seek the mere gratification of his intellect, or the pampering of his self-complacency. The Spirit will unfold to him the mysteries of the kingdom in the order that belongs to this revelation, having regard to the actual measure of intelligence, obedience, aspiration on the part of the believer. We may well believe that there are things in the Scripture that are yet not wholly understood by any but the Spirit that dictated them; but we may equally well believe that some are on the way to the comprehension of them, and one or two or three much nearer than others. He that overcometh shall inherit all things. The entire Scripture is an Apocalypse to the believer: the word 'apocalypse' signifies a taking away of the veil. We come to Christ for the purpose of getting rid of mysteries; we come to him for life, and life is light.

Surely if anything in the world is intelligible it must be 'faith," to one who really wishes to know. It is of faith that it might be by grace, says the apostle, speaking of salvation; but if this grand condition of salvation were something very difficult to understand, how could it be spoken of as pre-eminently signalising the grace of God? His grace is his free gift, unpurchased by the remotest

approximation to a work on man's part. Faith is just reception; neither more nor less. God from his throne in heaven says to the sinner who is conscious of his need of a Saviour, Wilt thou have this man to be thy Saviour? Perhaps thou answerest, Who is he, Lord, that I may believe upon him, that I may take him for my Saviour? Then God replies: He is mine elect, my well-beloved Son, Jesus of Nazareth, in whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwelleth. Surely thou wilt make answer, O favoured sinner, Yes, Lord, I take him to be my Saviour, him and none other, him now and evermore. What means this shouting in heaven? Why these harpers harping with their golden harps? Simply because thou hast believed, and everlasting life is come to thee. Faith is acquiescence; acquiescence in the Divine arrangements concerning thee; acquiescence in the reign of Christ, in the work of the Spirit, in the directions of the Gospel.

This then is the one grand means by which men are to get the benefit of Christ. Nothing done to thee, no rite performed in thy behalf, no round of works accomplished by thee, will cause the life that is in him to find its way to thee. Thou hast but to take what he freely gives thee. And what is that? Forgiveness of thy sins. Access to the Father. His own influence as an intercessor. Gratitude. Self-condemnation. Hatred of sin. The Holy Spirit. The knowledge of his will, and conformity to it. The hope of glory. In one word, Life everlasting; for this one word includes all. Thou hast it the very moment thou believest on Christ. The branch has one life with the vine; and it has one life with all the other branches of the vine. They that

are truly in Christ cannot but be in one another. In this life is all the fulness of the Godhead; which fulness is more and more revealed to us, and more and more manifested by us as we by faith do more and more give ourselves to Christ.

'Verily, verily I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.'—JOHN VI. 53.

CHRIST had already spoken of himself as the bread of heaven come down from heaven to give life unto the world. They had wished him to give them their daily bread miraculously; and had been told by him that the life he came to give was life that they had not; not bodily life but spiritual; the hunger he came to satisfy was that of the soul. His exposition of the miracle of the multiplied loaves indicated that the life they needed was in himself, and was to be appropriated by them by means of faith in himself. He goes on to point out another feature of the parallel; bread must be broken to be eaten; he must die that the life in him may be communicated; they must eat his flesh and drink his blood.

The language is startling; but the very boldness of the metaphor shows that it is a metaphor. The prophets of the Old Testament had spoken of eating the words of God; "thy words were found, and I did eat them;" but no one ever thought of taking this in a literal sense. Elsewhere we hear of some who are washed in the blood of Christ; and of some whose robes are made white in the blood of the

Lamb. Christ is called Christ our Passover; and this expression directly bears upon the words of our text. Forbidden by the very strength of the metaphor to take it literally, the hearers should have known for themselves that Christ's words were the life he had spoken of: "the flesh profiteth nothing, my words they are spirit and they are life;" the flesh even of Christ profiteth nothing except as a means of manifesting himself, his spirit; in the words of Christ the believer finds the spirit and the life of Christ.

The passover lamb was life to the Israelites when the destroying angel passed through the land: its blood sprinkled upon the doorpost was like the signature of the King of heaven, exempting them from harm. Then they ate the lamb, whose bones were unbroken. This was a notable prefiguring of Christ in his relations to the believer. He dies for us atoningly; his blood absolves from sin; but there must be an appropriation of his spirit and life; he dies on the cross that he may live in his people. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." "Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." "Christ our life." And in the parable of the vine, he says, "Abide in me, and I in you," and then immediately, "Abide in me, and my words in you." So the apostle Peter: "Born again, of the incorruptible word, desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby."

When Christ tells us that the bread of communion is his body and the wine his blood, the believer, well aware that his flesh profiteth nothing, and hungering and thirsting after the life and spirit of Christ, recognises the institution as one helpful pre-eminently to faith. It wonderfully

assists him to understand that Christ died for him individually and for his brethren individually; that his sins are remitted; that the fulness that was in Christ is made over to him; that as he was, so we may be in the world; as the love of the Father was in him, so it is in us. 'My peace I leave unto you; my joy be with you; my Father's love be yours; the Father and I and the Holy Ghost shall come to you; the words given to me I have given you:' all these assurances are symbolised and emphasised and brought more home to our faith by the bread and by the wine. And only they who by faith enter into the peace and joy and righteousness of Christ, can apprehend the true meaning of the Lord's Supper, and appropriate its singular blessings.

But what a strange announcement is here made by Christ that men, all men, are without life! To say that they are without understanding, without sensibility, without power, without virtue, would be very little in comparison with the declaration that they are without life. They have something that they call life, and cling to as their all in all; but they are told that there is a something high above this beyond comparison, their true life forfeited by them and notified to them by no experience, what they call life being nothing but death, the privation of the true life. But inasmuch as their experience tells them not of it, they fail to form any such conception of it as would make it an object of desire; in fact, it is a part of their death that they are without desires for it. There is in their heart an unsatisfied void, a sense of need; but their imagination cheats them as to what the need is, and disguises to their

minds the life which is of God in Christ. What then can the Gospel do? It can speak to them of unending life; of deliverance from fear and from self-condemnation; of the friendship of an Almighty Being; of exemption from much that is sad in their experience. And when those who have tasted of the river of the water of life are enabled to rejoice in the Lord always, to abstain contentedly from that which is appetising and attractive in the world, to encounter humiliations and losses and manifold trials with a serene courage and a victorious faith, men are much helped to understand that there is a higher life.

Christ came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly. It is of unspeakable importance that we should have it more abundantly; with a fulness that shall enable us to triumph over the world at every point, and to joy in Christ with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Hast thou life? be not satisfied till it is thine so abundantly that it shall demonstrate itself to men around, and convince them by the grace of God that they are really dead in trespasses and sins. The branch that bringeth forth fruit must be purged to bring forth more fruit.

What a hearty and thorough appropriation of Christ is signified by the expression, 'To eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of man.' If it means anything it means that he gives himself wholly to each believing sinner; gives all his influence at the throne of his Father, gives all his omnipotent power over the heart, gives all the fulness of the blessings of his word, gives his presence and his boundless sympathy. With too much reason, alas! may he say to us, 'Have I been so long time with you, and yet

have ye not known me? Have ye so long had my promises, and yet do you understand so little the plenitude of my grace? Have I in vain raised up for you Paul to give you an example from what and to what my grace can elevate? You are astonished at your own faith: to me it appears less than a grain of mustard-seed.'

'Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city.'—MATT. x. 15.

As the responsibility shall be the judgment; and as the light is the responsibility. The people of Sodom had a law written in their own hearts, and knew well that they were transgressing it. Their responsibility was increased when Lot took up his residence among them. This preacher of righteousness testified strongly against their evil ways. They might refuse to listen to the still, small voice within; they might argue that if God really so hated their actions, he would not commit his testimony to a still, small voice that they could scarcely hear, or could easily refuse to hear; one little faint voice within the heart against a thousand voices without loudly proclaiming that God had given men liberty to do as they liked; and they might refer to the course of providence which suffered them to go on, not sending upon them such destruction as, if their ways were really so odious, might naturally be expected. But when Lot lifted up his voice in the cause of God's insulted majesty, and set forth in all fidelity the law of God, and

assured the people of coming judgment, and when God, in some adequate way, bore testimony from heaven that Lot was indeed his truthful messenger, then their conscience recovered from the repression put upon it, and spoke out loudly and ominously of coming wrath. But they repented not. Instead of giving their chief attention to the testimony actually borne from heaven to the truth of Lot's words, they busied themselves rather in finding out evidence that Lot himself was not so irreproachable as he should be, and that they were accordingly under no great obligation to conform to his instructions. Then came destruction upon the guilty region, not merely for the sake of Sodom and Gomorrha, but in order to increase the responsibility of other cities and nations, by showing that the objection drawn from their temporary impunity has no validity. That objection lured the Sodomites to their destruction, and they are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. If we look round the world we see enough in the way of temporal punishment to show that God does not overlook the sins of men, and to admonish, in that the unjust are reserved unto the day of judgment to be punished. The judgment upon Sodom expresses not merely the Divine wrath against the sins for which that place was conspicuous; but for this superadded and crowning sin, that a servant of God dwelt for a while among them, holding out the word of life, and they rejected his words.

Twenty centuries, with their successive contributions to the revelation made of himself by God to man, came and laid down their gifts and went, after Lot had ended his ministry, before Messiah came. He sends forth those who

have heard him and been fitted by him, to preach his Gospel among men. With every one of them goes light such as the fathers had faintly dreamt of. The Sermon on the Mount, with all its expositions of the length and breadth of God's law, and all its testimony to his holiness and purity, went with each of them ; the Gospel of Christ's holy life and benignity and gracious works and words went with them ; Christ went with them in the word which told of him, in his promises and invitations and offers of eternal life.

The word of God which men hear is the word that shall judge them in the last day. It is what they reject that shall witness against them then. What they reject, what they refuse to be influenced by, is not much in their thoughts ; it is excluded from their thoughts ; if they think of the judgment day, it is in connection with those expressions of the Divine will that are not so much disregarded by them ; and what they have most to dread is what they least dread.

The Jews of the present day, for instance, are chiefly occupied with sundry laws of the Old Testament and rabbinical traditions ; what they dread is the punishment due to the transgression of those laws and traditions ; how far are they from thinking that they are to be tried by a word which they put completely away from them, the word of Christ's Gospel ! They trouble themselves about the condemnation due to a multitude of little things which are of no account whatever in comparison with the grand question, What reception have you accorded to Christ ? And as it is with them so it is with all who hear his Gospel. The refusal to submit to this will place them in a worse

category than the people of Sodom were placed in by their revolting sensuality.

Find the nation, find the age on which has been bestowed the largest measure of light, and you will find those on whom the heaviest judgment shall fall. Was ever an age more favoured in this respect than ours is? If you insist that they who actually saw Christ were more favoured, your attention may be called to the fact that Christ's veil of human flesh screened him from the recognition of men; that the greatest evidence was furnished when he died and rose, and ascended on high; that Christianity has created the capacity for becoming best acquainted with its claims; that the accumulated evidence of all past ages is with us. Never, surely, was there more light in the world than there is now; never was there greater responsibility.

"Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet." Your visit and your reception have been noted in heaven. The missionary who, in this year of grace 1869, tells the story of Christ to the heathen, is to bear in mind that the rejection of Christ's words is the sealing up of their fate. It must however be understood that Christ's very truth, in a form in which they can understand it, in simplicity and godly sincerity, is to be preached to them; and that they are to be furnished with such evidence as is proper to the Gospel, and suited to affect their darkened minds. A part of this evidence is in the influence which the Gospel has over the lives of those that preach it; in their disinterestedness and freedom from worldly ends and sordid motives; in their life of faith; in their meekness and readi-

ness to suffer; in their manifest love to men and desire for their welfare. See the instructions (ver. 8-10) that introduce the words of our text. There is reference also to works of a supernatural character, fitted more than aught besides to impress the minds of carnal men and secure their attention to the Gospel thus accompanied. The modern missionary knows nothing of such evidence; and the absence of it is to a certain extent a counter-evidence against him. How does this affect *his* responsibility? These works no man, by virtue of any endowments of his own, through any mere force of will, ever could or ever can perform. It is God only that can perform them. Yet the command is addressed to the disciples: "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead." The command was addressed to their faith. The servant of Christ does not now believe that Christ is willing to work such miracles through him; they cannot then be wrought. He is responsible to give those whom he addresses all the evidence he can; and it is possible that his want of faith may be the cause that less evidence is given than might be given. Perhaps if he were more careful to give men such evidence as would be furnished by a more apostolic simplicity of life, self-denial, and unworldliness, by faith in God for all that we ourselves need, by a more perfect conformity to Christ, by more of mutual love, by the power of its spirit put forth on our own characters, God might bear testimony from heaven by such displays of his power as are best fitted to impress the minds of unconverted men.

We must bear in mind that the light is as the evidence; as this is obscured, so is that. The apostles were commanded

to tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high. We have undertaken this great work of carrying the Gospel to the heathen; have we sufficiently felt the great need of being endued with power from on high? What if we should come together in prayer, and continue in prayer, until the Spirit should descend in power such as we have not known? This power would be first felt in ourselves, and would demonstrate its presence by convincing us of many sins that we have hitherto shut our eyes to or glossed over; by giving us victory after victory over the monsters, Selfishness and Unbelief; by uniting us in mutual love according to the prayer of Christ, "As thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may know that thou hast sent me."

'Verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.'—MATT. x. 23.

THESE words occur in the discourse which our Lord pronounced when he set apart the twelve, and sent them forth to preach the Gospel. He did not limit his attention to the brief itineraries which they were to make while his ministry yet lasted; his eye looked down the future, and saw clearly what should happen to them when, after his ascension and after Paul's conversion, they should go into all lands and be brought before kings and governors for his sake. At the same time he used language that was specially appropriate to the circumstances in which they were. Until his own complete rejection by the Jews, he did not expressly

commission them to preach to any other, though his language constantly implied that a time should come when the Gospel of the kingdom would be preached in all the world.

Their deep-rooted idea that the kingdom of the Messiah would come in great power and glory, and their tendency to postpone all other expectations and obligations till this supreme idea should be realised, he sought to dispose of by speaking to them of a future coming, another advent. He was to go and return; and there was to be a work for them to do against his return; and in the prosecution of this work they were to have constant reference to that future advent; looking for it and preparing for it just as the Jews had looked for the first coming of the Messiah. The bridegroom was now with them; but he should be taken away; and in due time he should return for his bride. They were to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; they would encounter opposition and persecution; instead of staying to battle with this opposition, they were to consider it an indication of Providence that they should go to other places and preach the Gospel to those who had not heard. For the work given them to do demanded all the time given for the doing of it. They were to act as men who are under a pressure; who have no time to spare. If they should have no time to spare in suffering avoidable persecution for Christ's sake, no time to spare in preaching the Gospel where the people had fully manifested their opposition to it, much less had they any to spend in self-indulgence. They were to give themselves with all their powers and resources and time, to the work of carrying everywhere the glad tidings of salvation.

At first they would understand by the cities of Israel the cities of Palestine. Afterward they would perceive that Christ's commission required them to go to all cities where the lost sheep of the house of Israel were to be found. The Spirit of truth, guiding them into the fuller understanding of Christ's words, would cause them to seek after the other sheep not of this fold which were to be sought out and gathered, so that there might be one fold, as there is one Shepherd.

It may be remarked that the Jews by their successive deportations have been so wonderfully scattered, that a mission to the Jews is really a mission to all nations. Settlements of Jews have been discovered in our own day even in the heart of China; and it is quite possible that there are colonies of Jews in parts of the world yet unvisited by the Gospel. So that the disciples of Christ can hardly yet be said to have gone over the cities of Israel, the localities where the lost sheep of the house of Israel are to be found.

But the principles which underlie these words of Christ are of importance to all whom he has ordained to be witnesses for him in this world, to all Christians. They are these: Christ is coming again in the glory of his Father with the angels; his Gospel is to be preached as widely as possible; his servants are to be incited and sustained in the proclamation of it by the expectation of his glorious return. The doctrine of the second advent is to stimulate to evangelistic work; this is the grand consideration which is to nerve Christians to the use of all diligence in conveying the Gospel to their fellow-men. Christ is detained in heaven

by our neglect to diffuse the Gospel; all men are to be told of his humiliations and death, before they see his glory in the skies.

Our wisdom is ready to substitute another scheme for this. It seems to many in these days that the wisest plan is to make one or two nations thoroughly Christian; and when they have been made so then the Gospel will diffuse itself almost naturally throughout the whole world. But we have waited in vain to see even a small village in England or America made thoroughly Christian, even when the means of grace have been provided with an unlimited prodigality. We find that even as the sanctification of the Christian advances most rapidly and happily, when he is giving himself most heartily to the communication of his blessings to others, so nations are most helped forward in righteousness as they are most mindful of the obligation to preach the Gospel to every creature. It is found more blessed to give than to receive. After so many ages of Bible teaching, what a fearful amount of practical heathenism and atheism still remains in England! Are we not warranted in believing that if one-half of her 50,000 preachers were scattered over the world, in the sincere endeavour to make men acquainted with the Christ who once came and suffered, and who is to come again in the clouds of heaven to judge the world, there would be showers of blessings in England such as we have not seen? The brass of the pulpit would become silver, and the silver gold.

The churches newly gathered among the heathen become vigorous and clothed with life and beauty just in the degree that they seek to be lights in the world, *holding forth* the

word of life; in a word, just in the degree in which they become mission churches. The light only illuminates ourselves as we share it with others. The word that comes to the Christian heart to bless it commissions that heart to communicate it to others; otherwise it soon ceases to bless. How imperfectly is this thing yet understood! How many imagine that all they have to do with the word is to be saved by it. Whereas it only saves by making us saving. A Christian is an anointed one. The Spirit of life is life-diffusive. "He that believeth on me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. The water that I will give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up to everlasting life." But a well-spring is for many.

The favourite idea of missions is to find a people that will receive the word, and then give one's-self wholly to them; concentrate upon them all our attention, and congratulate ourselves solely upon the conquest of them. But it seems from Christ's instructions that he that preaches a rejected word is accomplishing Christ's will, hasting unto the day of the Lord, and hastening that day, as much as his more immediately successful fellow-labourer. At all events, whether men hear or whether they forbear, there is a grand purpose of the Master accomplished by the world-wide proclamation of the word; and there is reason to believe that the more widely and fully it is proclaimed in the world, the nearer is that day for which the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain. O for a baptism of the Spirit that all who hope for salvation may hope for it in efforts to make known to others the way of life! A time shall come when no man shall need to say to his brother, Know the

Lord, for all shall know him from the least unto the greatest; but before that, every Christian man shall feel that there is a need, an urgent need for him to tell his brothers of that Gospel by which alone they may know the Lord.

'Verily, verily I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.'—JOHN VIII. 34.

THIS is followed by the statement that the servant abideth not in the house for ever; he is liable to be dismissed; he has no claim upon the continued hospitality of the master; he has certain privileges and certain obligations, under a terminable covenant. Christ intimates to the Jews that between the most of them and God there was only this terminable covenant; they were servants, and could be dismissed; the kingdom could be transferred from them to others. There was a spiritual Israel with far higher privileges; enfranchised by the Son, they rejoiced in a covenant that time might not dissolve.

Blended with this is another train of thought. They were in bondage because they were in sin. He that committeth sin is the servant of sin. If this was true of those who had part in the Mosaic covenant, much more is it true of men generally. The principle affirmed is of universal application. It teaches that all men are in bondage until Christ has made them free. This is one of the points that are at issue between Christianity and the world. Men admit that they are sinners; but deny that they are in subjugation to sin. They claim that their self-sovereignty is

undestroyed. They have power over their sin to trample it under foot and rise superior to it. Christ says that they have not this power. Sin has entered them to rule them. They are subject to its laws. They cannot without power from above, without his aid, break its bonds asunder. Its essence is deceit; and there is nothing to wonder at in the fact that they should be unconscious of their subjection to it; for its sway is herein, that it takes away from them the power of rightly judging of their own moral state and needs.

He that commits sin by that very fact forfeits his power to resist sin. He that commits sin accepts of sin's account of itself. It disarms him by persuading him that it is not sin, is not of any great culpability, is nothing to be afraid of. To commit sin is to give up some of the power of conscience, some of the accuracy of our moral judgment. Outside of us it has an evil look; appears as an enemy; and our whole nature is in opposition to it: inside of us it appears a friend, and takes captive the stalwart powers stationed for the defence of the soul. And this is the reason why the salvation that Christ offers meets with such dubious welcome from men. That salvation supposes that men are enthralled by sin; led captive by it; blinded by it; possessed by it as Samson was by the Philistines, though without Samson's force-recovering secret; possessed by it beyond all power of self-deliverance.

How can this be? Have we not power over sin? Do we not lay aside this or that sin when we see the evil of it, and see the need of conquering it? And do we sometimes attain to this perception of the evil of it? Is reforma-

tion unknown among us? Is conscientiousness lost to us? Have we not a moral sense, and have we not moral power? Are there not men of conspicuous virtue among those who owe nothing to Christ's enfranchisement? If we are the servants of sin, whence our admiration of noble deeds, our ambition to imitate them, our complacency in virtue, our detestation of vice? Can any one fail to see how much is done for the elevation of mankind by the memory of the great and the good of all ages and all nations?

The reply to this is, that the doctrine of Christ does not make every man a committer of all sin. Sin enters the heart to separate it from God, to detach it as a railway carriage may be detached from the engine, by a single link; the object of sin is not to ravage and ruin the soul to the uttermost and immediately. God has been pleased so to endow man, and so to constitute society, that a great deal that is beautiful and noble will continue for a while to flourish. The alliance with God is gone; the alliance with man remains; and it is not quickly perceived that God is wanting to us. Many Divine faculties and tendencies remain, and, under favourable circumstances, have considerable influence. Beautiful deeds are done; noble words are spoken; the mean and the unworthy are detested and eschewed. All is well, all is admirable, if the heart may be allowed to determine for itself what the law of its being is, what is and what is not sin. But nothing may determine the law of its own being. He that has created may alone determine it. His law is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy life." His law is that we

should abide in him, and receive everything from him, and depend on him as the branch on the vine; and his curse follows the violation of this law. We have seen a severed branch of a tree that retained the appearance of vitality some time, even putting forth buds; but the tiny treasure of virtue that was in it when broken off soon spent itself, and there was nothing more for it in heaven or in earth. When man departs from the living God, he carries a portion of goods with him; but he has turned his back on him whose smile is needed to give his treasures their true grace and excellence, whose wisdom can alone guide in the dispensing of them; it is a mere question of time; in the far off city he may be a Plato, a Socrates, or a Seneca; sooner or later he is reduced to the condition of the prodigal son; his beggarliness of virtue shall sooner or later be made manifest to the whole universe. Jesus looked upon the rich young ruler, and loved him; there were some engaging qualities in him; but without faith it is impossible to please God; this one thing he lacked: he could not surrender his own will and wisdom, and take those of God; so he went away with his wealth, or rather it went away with him; no one perhaps ever suspected it before, but now it became manifest that he was so far the servant of sin, as to decline the service of Christ, the enfranchisement of Christ.

This age glories in its exemption from bondage. It is free as never age was before. It abhors servitude. It is free-thinking. But no one that makes his own law is free; and there never was an age when men were more intent on making their own law than this. They little dream that it is in bondage to sin, that is, in obedience to the dictates of

somewhat beside the sole just Dictator, that they run the race of what they call freedom.

The truth shall make you free. The truth which tells you that you have divorced yourself from the Fountain of light and strength and goodness; that you have only the fleeting virtue of a severed branch; that Christ alone of men has been found pure and spotless and divine; has been raised from the dead for all; that in him there is a recovery for us; that he is made of God unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. The truth shall make you free by delivering you from yourself, your self-will, your preference of your own glory to that of God; by inspiring you with faith; by destroying the halo and the fascinations of sin; by taking away that fatal barrier to liberty, death; by giving you meekness and lowliness, self-conquest and the love of Christ; by shedding abroad the love of God in your heart; by assuring you that all things shall work together for good to you, and nothing ever be able to separate you from Christ; by teaching you to walk in love, and to find it more blessed to give than to receive; and by ministering unto you an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

'Verily, verily I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.'—John viii. 51.

The fabulists who delight in taking God's world to pieces that they may make it over again according to their own fancy, and who think that the wonderful in what is

can bear no comparison with the wonderful in the products of their imagination, sometimes whisper in the ear of some forlorn favourite a mystic word of impenetrable meaning, by virtue of which he treads under foot the difficulties of time and sense, lays hold of all supposed laws of nature and crumples them in his hand; speaks, and brazen gates fly open; speaks, and they shut for ever; speaks, and the absent are present, the present disappear; speaks, and death itself ceases to be the master, surrendering its victims, withdrawing its claims. Thus in the dream-world man seeks food for his wonder-loving fancy, little weening that God's world has wonders incomparably greater. The Son of God has brought a word into this world which a man has only to receive into his heart, and lo! all things are possible to him, all difficulties are subject to him, and victory over all enemies, including death, the last, is secured to him.

The announcement is met with universal incredulity. Very pretty; very striking as a form of expression; but literally untrue, and true only in a sense so strained as to make the statement valueless. This is the view taken by most.

But the cavillers are really put out of court by the admission which they are obliged to make that they have not personally tested the declaration. He that KEEPETH the word of Jesus shall never see death; to him only the marvels of the word are promised; to him only is it given *to see* the power that belongs to the word. The New Jerusalem cometh down from God out of heaven (I once saw it in a dream; its edifices were incomplete, its columns were rising, it was growing towards the measure of the

stature of a perfect city in Christ ; a city of the earth was below it, even a city like this Bombay ; it grew as it descended, but its descent was scarcely perceptible ; others around seemed to see nothing of it) : only they who are of it can see it ; except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Yet even the unbeliever, if he could reason as impartially about religion as about other things, would have to acknowledge that Christ's word has exercised a power which nothing else in this world ever did. He left to his disciples this word, and nothing more ; this word by virtue of which they inherited all that wrath of the world which had crucified him on Calvary. Did they keep it ? At first it seemed as though they would not ; they denied and forsook him ; the word was too terrible a word to be kept ; it began by costing them all they held dear. However, the prayer of Christ prevailed ; they did not shake it utterly from them ; before it was lost they grasped it convulsively ; they returned to the Sufferer, the cross, the tomb ; it conducted them then to the throne of grace, and made them prevalent in prayer ; it worked mightily in them, casting out of their hearts many vain dreams and delusive speculations which had hitherto cruelly choked it. Pentecost came, and then the word was clothed with its own fulness of power. They went forth conquering and to conquer. No Cæsar, no Alexander ever encountered such difficulties as they did. The Cæsars of the world, one after another, hurled against them all they had of power ; but the apostles of Jesus of Nazareth triumphed, Christian churches were gathered everywhere, multitudes were

baptized for the dead. The consecrated mythologies of ages, intertwined with the affections and the sensibilities and the genius and the art of many glorious centuries, the old-world religions of Assyria, Egypt, Greece, Rome, Scandinavia, all were successively overthrown, pulverised, annihilated. The battle is not yet spent; but the word of Christ maintains its own, fuses itself into every language, visits every clime, utters itself in the midst of every nation, and enriches millions of hearts with peace, gratitude, humility, love, and hope. Are we saying too much when we affirm that the world, if it would view the matter impartially, would see these marvellous victories of Christ's word?

If the word of the solitary and unbefriended Nazarene has really had this stupendous sway in the world, so that even now it is a hundred-fold more spoken of than any other word, is it reasonable to predicate of such declarations as the one now considered, extravagance or unmeaningness? It is more reasonable to presume that if we cannot see the truth of them, it must be because of the falsehood in us.

The word of Christ is that by means of which a reunion is effected between the sinner and God. It is the word of reconciliation, revealing God as Saviour, as One providing salvation through the death of the Lamb, and offering it freely to every one that believeth, every one that willeth. It is the word which casts down the heaven-high mountains reared by our sins between us and God; mountains of sins, each sin having the torments of hell wrapped up in it; mountains of accumulated sins, to remove a single one

of which not all the angelic host would have been equal; all these mighty and unscalable mountains swept away by a single word, the word of Christ. It takes them away from between us and God, by the oblation offered on the cross; and it unites us to God in a bond that nothing has power to sever. United to God, all things are ours; all the perfections of God are engaged to fulfil in our behalf all the promises of God.

Christ is himself the Word of God. Keeping his word in our heart, we keep him; keeping him we keep the Father; all the Godhead is with the word, is in the word which we hide in our heart.

What now about death? Death is that which came to man when he departed from God. Sin obtained dominion, and the life of God vanished from his heart and mind. Without any promises, any covenant, any hold upon the aid of God, he was thrown into the midst of the world's amphitheatre, to be the prey of the world's evil. The fear of physical death dogs him at every step, and clouds the whole of his mortal existence; finally, he dies in his sins, having no passport to the realms of life and light.

The last enemy is overcome by the word which keeps the believer in conscious enjoyment of God's love; the death which has no power to interrupt his communion with the Father and with the Son cannot be called death. But Christ has in his hand the keys of Hades and of death; and there is reason to believe that among the final displays of his power will be the extinction of even that penumbra of death which now comes to the believer. "We shall not all sleep; but we shall all be changed."

'Verily, verily I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.'—JOHN VIII. 58.

MANY surprising words fell from the lips of Jesus; words that could not and would not have been spoken by any other, in truth or in falsehood; words that imply the possession of unlimited power, absolute authority, omniscience, omnipresence. Yet there is not the least trace of pretension in such declarations; they are found in the rear of acts and testimonies that unquestionably declare the same things. In other words scarcely less surprising, he insists upon his humanity, his limited nature, his restricted knowledge, his privation (as a man) of all merit: "There is none good save one, that is, God; I can of mine own self do nothing." When we see him walking on the waters, controlling the elements, raising the dead, we feel that it is simply condescension on his part to unfold to us the mysteries of his being, to tell us of that God who is manifest in his flesh, and of the humanity in which God is manifest.

But no more astonishing word ever fell from the lips of Christ than this: "Before Abraham was, I am." Should any one fancy the meaning to be, Before Abraham ceased to be, I am, the Greek will correct him; its meaning being, Before Abraham existed, I am. The I AM is the I AM of Divinity. "God said unto Moses, I am that I am: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you; the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you" (Ex. iii. 14, 15). All the fulness of the Godhead is in these words. If we think of One upon

the throne of the universe competent to utter the I am of supreme Divinity, and to speak universes into existence or non-existence, let us know that that One says to us in Christ, I am. The "I" of Christ is the "I" of God: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." "I will, be thou clean!" said Jesus to the leper; and the immediate annihilation of the man's leprosy shows us who it is that says "I will."

"He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not." Constrained by an evil heart of unbelief, man has departed from the living God, the God in whom is life, and who alone of all beings is able to say in the sovereign sense of the words "I am;" has departed from the living God, and made gods for himself in whose presence sin is less tormenting. The "advanced thought" of the present day is against idolatry; but it is also against the idea that there can be any special manifestation of God. The tremendous interval which separates God's almightiness from our pettiness is taken as the measure of the impossibility that he should become manifest to us. But an equally tremendous consideration is neglected, namely, that God is love, and delighteth in mercy, and has made man in his own image with the very purpose of revealing himself to him. Man is fearfully and wonderfully made, being made so that there may be a sublime manifestation of God in his nature; and the proof of this is given in the person of Jesus. The "I am" was made flesh, and dwelt among us. If we were walking in accordance with the true laws of our being, we should have no difficulty in understanding this matter of the Incarnation; our repugnance to believe shows

how sin has made havoc of our nature, what a ruined thing is our boasted humanity.

Before Abraham existed, I am. I that speak to you from the lips of Jesus of Nazareth spoke with Adam within and without the walls of Paradise; walked with Enoch; shut Noah in the ark; called Abraham out of Haran; and spoke to Moses out of the burning bush. All the Divine wisdom that makes the Gospel precious to the believer was present when commandments were given to the patriarchs, when the law was proclaimed on Sinai, and when the prophets spoke to the kings of Israel; even as the wisdom and knowledge that speak to men from the fruit-laden branches of the mature tree are present with the seed and with the sapling.

The Old Testament sins and deficiencies that are so offensive to the disciple of the New Testament could not have been dealt with by a revelation like that of the Gospel. God could have taken away the liberty of man, and then have stamped arbitrarily upon his mind whatever seemed good to him; but God is Himself, and not what we may fancy him: therefore he has left man his liberty, and given him such a revelation as he could be persuaded to receive; beginning with a comparatively slight interference with his will, allowing a large exhibition of reckless and vicious self-will; increasing the measure of that interference, and curbing that exhibition, by slow degrees; gradually breaking him in; not forsaking him utterly, when violent outbreaks and relapses seemed to show that nothing had been won; foreshadowing and preparing for the future fuller dispensations of truth. Imagine Moses descending from Mount Sinai with the tables of the law, and descrying the Israelites

prostrate before the golden calf; imagine him drawing near and addressing them in the language of the Sermon on the Mount. They to whom the merest letter of the law was almost unendurable would never have been persuaded to receive, even if they could have understood, a law that searched the heart and taxed the faint germinant desire with guilt. The course of the divine revelation was that of the dawn of day; the faintest crepuscular light, showing a thousand-fold more darkness than it dissipates, slowly, imperceptibly, increasing unto the perfect day. The Old Testament is the exhibition of a world of sin, with at first the faintest irradiation of heaven's light; it is a broad valley of sin, with at first a tiny rill of goodness traversing it; the rill gradually deepens and broadens into a stream, and goes on wearing a wider and still wider channel for itself; but the little rill and the broad overflowing Nile are one stream; the wisdom that was incarnate in Christ was present with the patriarch. See the altar where Abel offers his lamb in sacrifice; see that rude altar on Mount Moriah where Abraham offered up his only and well-beloved son, and received him again as from the dead; observe the outstretched arms of Moses on the hill, securing victory over the Amalekites; consider the brazen serpent lifted up in the wilderness; the feast of the passover; the manna, the smitten rock, the Aaronic priesthood, the ascension of Enoch and Elijah; trace the stream of Messianic prophecy; and find in all the evidence that the Lamb which taketh away the sin of the world was slain from the foundation of the world: "Before Abraham was, I am." "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

Verily, verily I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.'—JOHN X. 1.

THE chapter-makers have made an unfortunate rupture in the address commenced by our Lord in the latter part of the 9th chapter. The whole is intimately and vitally connected with the account of the blind man whose eyes Christ opened, and whose gratitude was proof against the sophistries of the Pharisees. It was not merely in the character of a Succourer that Christ wrought that miracle, but as the Light of the world; in doing it he was engaged in the same campaign against the erroneous teachings of the Pharisees that we find him waging in this 10th chapter.

The most touching and beautiful incident in that account is the conduct of Jesus when notified that the poor man had been put out of the synagogue, excommunicated, *discasted*, by the religious authorities, the rulers of the Jewish Church. The poor man had been warned that to confess Christ was nothing less than the sin of schism; if he should presume to make light of the teaching of the Church he would be treated as a schismatic, and cut off from the covenanted mercies of the people of God; cast forth as a withered branch, a dissenter, a vagabond upon the face of the earth. His parents shrunk from this terrible doom, and would have had their son shrink from it. But along with the gift of physical sight he had received from Christ that of the Holy Spirit, enabling him to see and hold by the measure

of truth at that time within his reach. Would that our rationalists could reason as sensibly as he did! Herein is a marvellous thing, he says. The opening of his eyes was a marvel; but this was not the greatest marvel. "Herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes." 'You call yourself the Church; the arbiters of truth; qualified to do the religious thinking for the community; to determine what men shall believe; and yet when one appears who opens the eyes of the blind by a mere word, you cannot make up your mind that he is more than a sinful man. We know that God heareth not sinners; that he does not lend his own sovereign power to those who are intent on overthrowing the truth. If this one were not of God he could do nothing but what others do.'

There was no place in the Jerusalem Church for any one who presumed to reason in this way. It was appalling to hear an uneducated man, a mere beggar, deliberately setting his own private judgment against that of the established and recognised guides of the community, the authoritative expounders of God's Word, the repositories of the traditions of a thousand years. What madness in him to suppose that he could be right when they proclaimed him to be wrong! So he is excommunicated. He is broken off from the Church, and cast forth a mere waif to perish on the great outside ocean of the world.

His position is a terrible one. He has got his sight, that is true; but at what a sacrifice! His father and mother have no idea of identifying themselves with a moral leper, though it be their own son; his friends, compelled to take

sides, dare not encounter the wrath of the Church-rulers; the poor man is alone, more alone than ever he was in his blindness. Men gave to him before, and thought it charity; but who that values his own peace or reputation will give anything to the schismatic, the heretic, the man that sets up his private judgment against the teaching of the Church?

Jesus had been abiding his time, and now appears on the scene. He finds the man; goes after him and finds him, and says unto him, "Dost thou believe in the Son of God?" The man replies, "Who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him?" Observe this admirable answer. The man was sure that Jesus was competent to make known to him all essential truth; he had faith in him as an infallible religious teacher; Christ was to him what too often the Church has claimed to be; the faith which the Pharisees demanded, and for the lack of which they excommunicated him, he gave to Christ, for he saw that with Christ were the credentials of God; no man could do such works except God were with him, qualifying him to make known unerringly the way of life. He makes no conditions; he does not say, I will believe, if what you say accords with my sense of what is right. The sense of right which God had given him assured him that the word of Christ was the word of truth, and that everything in himself must yield homage to that word of truth, or else pronounce judgment on itself. The sense of right which God now gives to the truly penitent sinner brings him in like manner to the word of Christ, the word of God.

Then Jesus said, Thou hast seen him, and it is he who

talketh to thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.

But he is out of the true fold. What a hapless destiny! He is cut off from the established Church, and from her ordinances. Can anything compensate for this?

Some of the Pharisees were present when the Lord received this forlorn dissenter, this stubborn schismatic, unto himself. Our Lord turns to them and informs them (39-41) that in excommunicating the poor man, they had been simply excommunicating themselves. They had proclaimed a broad gulf between him and them; and lo, the Lord of life and glory is seen not on their side of the gulf, but on his. They do not as yet recognise him as the Saviour and the Judge of men; but they that know Christ see plainly that these men, in pronouncing that sentence, have simply pronounced judgment against themselves. The private judgment which they stigmatised as so unpardonably erroneous and criminal, turns out to be the judgment of God, even of Him who saith, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not;" even of Him who giveth his Holy Spirit to them that ask him.

Christ says to the Pharisees: 'Ye say, We see; we are the seers of the community; we are on the watch-tower of God, and what we see we report to men; we are the shepherds who see for the sheep; see where the true pastures are to be found, what is the best path to walk in, what dangers are imminent; others are forbidden to see—it is not their province; we see for them; it is enough that they have our guidance. Thus professing, your sin remaineth;

and your sin is not merely that whereby the individual member of the flock destroys himself, but it is that by which the false shepherd destroys himself and the flock. "Verily, verily I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. Verily, verily I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them."' The poor man whom Jesus had restored to sight had found thieves and robbers clothed in the garb of the Church's pastors. Of what scanty treasures he had they stripped him. They robbed him of his good name; of the confidence and love of his parents and friends; of the prospect of a livelihood; and they would gladly have deprived him of his hope in God's mercy, but this they could not.

'Verily, verily I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.'—JOHN x. 7.

WE hear a great deal in these days about the Church. There is evidently a great diversity of opinion not only as to the body which is now entitled to be called by that name, but as to the body which in the history of the last eighteen centuries may rightly be so called. And it does almost seem as though men needed a special revelation from heaven to determine this matter for them. Yet it cannot be that there is any lack of instruction in God's Word regarding this all-important point. It would be a strangely defective revelation, if it told us about a multitude of things in heaven and earth, about the character of our heavenly

Father, the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the way of salvation, the day of judgment, the blessedness of the righteous, the New Jerusalem, and yet should leave us uninformed or half-informed as to the Church of Christ on earth. As a matter of fact the Scriptures are not more copious or lucid with regard to any point than with regard to this. The doctrine of the Spirit is essentially the doctrine of the Church; for the Spirit, whom to send it was expedient for us that Christ should ascend on high, is only manifest through the Church; Christians are a habitation of God through the Spirit; and whatever are the fruits of the Spirit, those are characteristics of Christians, the characteristics of the Church of Christ.

But here our Lord is pleased to tell it us in one word, a word that disposes of a great many of the pompous figments of the day: "I am the door of the sheep." "By me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." The Church is that body, of which Christ is the door, to which men gain access by faith in him. He does not more explicitly teach that men are saved through him, than that men obtain entrance into the Church through him. The man who had been blind, whose eyes he had opened, whom the Pharisees had put out of *their* Church, and to whose faith Christ had revealed himself as the Son of God and the Saviour of sinners, was, by that publicly avouched faith of his made a member of the true fold. Through Christ the door he had entered in, and it was not in the power of any man or set of men to pluck him out of the hand of Christ, to separate him from the true fold. "The foundation of God standeth sure, having

this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his." Salvation would be a very different, a sadly inferior thing to what it is, if the sinner had to share his reliance on Christ with reliance on fallible men like himself, and if the charter of life might be manipulated and modified by Scribes and Pharisees. What was true in the days of Christ's abode on earth is, alas! still true: there are men who busy themselves about the fold, who have never entered through the door; who claim to have guiding authority over the sheep, without being themselves genuine disciples of the meek and lowly One; who seek not the accomplishment of Christ's wishes, but their own temporal advantage. Their uncrucified pride, selfishness, ambition, and covetousness, influence them as much in their church-life, as ever they did in the non-religious life. They love the exercise of power; they desire to be looked up to and depended upon; they seek a revenue of fame and power from the Church; to use the plain words of the Master, they are "thieves and robbers," intent not on enriching the sheep but themselves.

"The thief cometh not but to steal, to kill, and to destroy." We must remember that this severe language was used of the clergy, the most prominent and influential rulers of the Church of that day. They organised the Church according to their own mind; nullified the laws of God by their traditions and Church regulations; ruled that they only could be regarded as God's people who yielded deference to them, and were guided implicitly by them. As salvation is in hearing, trusting, following Christ; so any system of doctrines that comes between the suppliant and Christ is destructive. It is conceded that these men know not what

they do. They have no spiritual perception; they do not see the kingdom of God, but something very different which they mistake for it; they have not themselves a simple, soul-subduing faith in Christ, and are not sensible of their need of it; they have never tasted the joy unspeakable, and the peace passing understanding which Christ gives to his own; consequently they know not what awful havoc they are making of the highest interests of men when they undertake the cure of souls.

"I am the door of the sheep." The fold is the earthly fold; the thieves and robbers that climb up some other way are not climbing into heaven, but into the communion of Christ's people on earth; "other sheep I have," says Christ, "not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one Shepherd." As there is one Shepherd so there is one fold, in which are gathered all who belong to Christ, all who have an interest in his salvation, who hear HIS voice and follow him; in a word, all true Christians; described in First Peter (ii. 5), as "a spiritual house;" and to which no others properly belong. "I am the door;" we enter it only by faith in him. This disposes of the idea that men are to be gathered into the fold first, and then brought to Christ; that there is a place in this fold for those who are not believers; it disposes of the idea of a national Church; of much that goes by the name of Catholicity and comprehension. Christ's salvation is revealed from faith to faith; from the faith of the evangelist to the faith of the hearer; men are added to the Church of God by the Spirit of God convincing them of sin, and inspiring them with faith in Christ.

As we enter the Church through Christ, we can only enter it by a change of heart, by the reception of Christ's Spirit. We have to lay down our selfishness and take up Christ's large-heartedness. We must therefore have something of his love for all his people. Far from us be the leaven of sectarianism. Being born of God, let us love one another with pure hearts fervently. Our common faith in him ought to enable us to know those that are his; and if we err here, the remedy is to be found in a stronger and a purer faith in him. He gave his life for the sheep; he came that they might have life, and might have it more abundantly: through us; for we are all commissioned to be helpers of one another's faith, and to help each other to know Jesus better.

"Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." It is a little flock. Men may seek to magnify it by bringing into it myriads of "goats," and by seeking to invest it with this world's honour and glory, but all this is grievously detrimental, and the kingdom will not be given to the Church until she shakes herself free from false encumbrances and alliances, and stands forth defined as Christ has defined her.

"The world knoweth us not, because it knew him not," says John. To the end the world will go on blindly disputing about Christ and about the world. But they that know him know each other, and are known of God. They are found in various organisations; in churches established and non-established; Episcopal, Presbyterian, Congregational, Wesleyan, Baptist, and the like; but they are not suffered by the Spirit of Christ that makes them one, to set up their

own organisation as the only true Church of Christ. They are too catholic for this, and shrink from the sin of rejecting any who may have the seal of the living God in their foreheads.

'Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.'—MATT. x. 42.

THESE words enforce and illustrate what our Lord had just before said : "He that receiveth you, receiveth me ; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me." The expression "one of these little ones" occurs half a dozen times in the Gospels. Its meaning in this place is indicated by the subjoined words, "in the name of a disciple," *i.e.* because he is a disciple. The discourse as a whole was addressed to the apostles ; but there appear to have been others, his disciples, standing by. The great principle that whosoever receiveth one whom Christ hath sent receiveth *him*, is best enforced not by a reference to the most favoured and advanced of his servants, but by an application to one that is least so. The least gift to the least distinguished servant of Christ is noticed, remembered, and acknowledged by Christ.

Christ sends his servants forth into what, he plainly assures them, is a hostile world. He would not have them deceive themselves on this point. 'Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. They shall persecute you to the death. Seek not the honour which cometh from man ;

dishonour awaits you. Expect not that they will recognise you as ambassadors of God; they will stigmatise you as emissaries of Beelzebub. You know that all power is mine; that power shall be exerted in your behalf; but not perhaps in the way that you would anticipate. Your path is not to be one of ease, but of privation. The servant is not greater than his lord. They have rejected me, they will reject you. Not a hair of your head shall perish without me; yet they shall put you to death. You are to be sustained in this arduous and costly path not by the expectation of certain visible results, but by the assurance of my presence and my countenance; by the assurance that the doing of my will is in itself of highest moment. A great end is attained when my message of love has been delivered to men, even when you are expelled from their gates, and have to shake off the dust of your departing feet. Yet if any receive you, an unspeakable blessing is theirs; they receive me; the least kindness shown to the least of you, for my sake, shall be recorded in heaven, and shall be requited with heaven's best blessing.'

There are some highly-gifted men in the ministry of Christ. They have the gift of eloquence, and the noblest in the land think it a privilege to hear them. The place where they preach is too strait for those who would attend their ministry. Many are so wrought upon by their oratory that they gladly enrol themselves among the followers of Christ. Their influence is very great; but perhaps it is not wholly spiritual, not wholly such as the Gospel aims at. Paul rejoices that the Corinthian Christians had not been won by his eloquence, "lest their faith

should stand in the wisdom of man," and fail when this should fail. There is, however, an eloquence that faith itself bestows—the eloquence of love; engaging the whole heart and soul in setting forth Christ crucified. But after all, that same Spirit who in the privacy of our closet opens our eyes to behold wonderful things out of God's word, is present where the Gospel is preached by men who are deficient in intellectual power and literary attainments, and is able to make the hearer recognise the word of Christ, and receive it as from Christ himself. And probably we shall find, at the last day, that the highly-educated servants of Christ have not won more souls than those of less culture have done. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." Our reference is not to indolent men who shrink from the searching of God's word, and from meditation on the law and characteristics of his kingdom, and from scrutiny of the Spirit's operations, and from inquiries regarding the needs and idiosyncrasies of men, and from persevering and whole-souled prayer. The want of culture in these slothful servants simply discloses to men, what God well sees, their spiritual nakedness and nothingness. But there are, we do not doubt, thousands of unobtrusive men scattered over the face of the earth, whose chief and habitual concern is that they may rightly interpret to men the message of Christ, who would yet be counted as "the little ones" among Christ's servants.

One object that our Lord had in making this closing remark was to strike a blow at the spirit of self-complacency which he saw more or less germinant in the minds of the apostles. It seems almost to belong to our identity

and individuality, that each one should be constantly trying to *differentiate* himself from others, by flattering himself that he has this or that that others have not. If we could disentangle this tendency from the sin that penetrates our entire organism, we should probably find in it a good gift of God, intended to establish between each soul and God a commerce of thankfulness and love. But it now takes simply the unsightly form of self-complacency. It follows men into the church; it follows them into the ministry; it follows them into the apostolate. The twelve disputed who should be the greatest. Christ would have them understand that there is for them only his greatness; that self for which they sought honour must be crucified, and in place of it there must be Christ; not I, but Christ liveth in me. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand, and giveth them to us only in him. Thou eminent minister or missionary or scribe, thy self-seeking robs thee of much, and makes thee a robber of many. The blessing that the world needs more than all thy gifts goes with the little one who, stammeringly it may be, yet effectually, holds forth the uncorrupted truth of Christ's Gospel.

'Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'—JOHN III. 3.

THE kingdom of God is that in which God is sovereign. His will is the will of all. His subjects are his children;

of like moral nature with him ; loving what he loves, shunning what he disapproves, seeking what he indicates. They are identified with him in interest : his glory is theirs ; of him, through him, and to him are all things in their apprehension. He reigns over them by reigning in them ; and his reign in them is the reign of infinite love. They are for him ; and he is for them ; and all things are for them.

Very different is the kingdom existing among men. They know, more or less, the will of God, but it is not congenial to them. Their will runs counter to his law. They find their pleasure in that which he forbids, and the things commanded are exceedingly distasteful to them. They have not the remotest conception of the truth that his requirements are the essential conditions of all happiness. Their trust is in themselves, not in him ; their deference is to their own inclinations, not to his ; their powers are consecrated to the doing of their own will. Their wills conflict with each other, and they accommodate them as best they can by sharing with each other the obligation of self-restraint ; but as regards God and the individual, it is not the former but the latter that is on the throne. The prayer of the natural heart is, My kingdom come, my will be done on earth and in heaven. And the man is angry when the course of nature, the course of providence, negatives his will.

Is this an exaggerated statement ? It is the sober truth. We say not that the will of every man is set upon all that is bad ; but we say that every unconverted man is bent upon having his own way, and that he *cannot* say from the heart, Thy will be done, thy kingdom come, thy name be

hallowed. We say not that he is bent upon stealing, defrauding, stabbing, and the like; but that the law of his being is not the searching out and doing of the will of his heavenly Father. To determine this matter, all you have to do is to hear what every man says of his neighbours; he will tell you plainly enough that they are not in the kingdom of God, their wills are not the will of God.

But men are not only alienated from God, they are blinded. They have become a law unto themselves; have set up a standard of their own; have lost the faculty of rightly judging which pertains exclusively to the reign of truth in the mind; and so they are not able to see the kingdom of heaven. This incompetency is not perhaps greatest in those who are most intellectual, but it is most striking in them. We are above all struck with it when we see it displayed by men who stand forward as counsellors and guides of the Christian world.

Some who claim to be in the van of modern thought wish us to regard God's kingdom as co-extensive with this world, and all nations and tribes as working out his will; and this, not in the sense recognised by all, that God has a plan which he is gradually introducing and imposing upon men, but in the sense that whatever is, in the moral and religious as in the physical world, is a part of his plan. They have sufficient ingenuity to discover in the various idolatries that have been and are, so many means of education, some more, some less elementary; and they concede to Christianity (as they understand it) simply the distinction of being the highest, and that which is adapted to the most cultivated condition of society. Christianity would cry

out in agony against this misconception of her nature; but they gag her with criticism.

Others recognise that the race is fallen; apostate; domineered by sin and error; hopeless without the Gospel. But this Gospel has not entered their hearts regeneratively; they speak of the Church, and of the necessity of being gathered into her bosom as into the ark; but some find her here, some there. The Church history of the one is the very opposite to that of the other. But need we wonder? is it not the easiest thing in the world for men to mistake in this matter? "they only who are born again can see the kingdom of God." Unless that kingdom is within us we cannot know it. They who by faith are enabled to discern the inheritance which is kept for Christ's people in the skies are able to recognise those for whom it is kept.

Many examples have been furnished, even in our own days, of persons who gave what was regarded by all as satisfactory evidence of their being true Christians, and who were afterwards the subjects of a change that they described as that of the new birth. Chalmers was in the ministry for years before he had this experience; and was at that time regarded by those around him as a rather unusually earnest minister. Doubtless there are many such as he was; they have taken up the standard which they found existing around them; they have a religious sentiment, and value the Gospel as they understand it; but they little know what a film there is upon their eyes, and into what a new world a change like that which Chalmers underwent would introduce them. The late Lord Haddo was for many years held in high regard

as a Christian man, and displayed, we are told, "every feature of the Christian character, as generally understood," when, in his thirty-second year, on a certain occasion he was suddenly impressed with the solemnity of eternity as he had never before been. He was arrested; brought to a complete halt; the powers of the world to come took hold upon him; the great facts of responsibility, sin, future judgment, closed in upon his spirit, and convinced him of his absolute need of a Divine deliverer. This immediately became the one need of his life. "Salvation now must be sought and attained, though the path to it lay through fire and water; no hardships were worth a moment's consideration in comparison of so great a price." Some may look at this as simply marking a transition to a higher life; but it was not a higher Christian life that he was seeking; it was salvation. He was ready to give up his wealth and title, and go to the end of the world as a poor and unknown man; and seriously thought of doing it, and would have done it, doubtless, if he had not been led to see that his wealth and title could by the grace of God be kept from hindering him in the heavenward race. He consecrated himself, his rank, wealth, influence to the cause of Christ, and soon enjoyed the testimony of the Spirit, witnessing with his spirit, that he was a child of God.

Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews; a religious ruler, a member of the Sanhedrim. "Art thou a master of Israel?" said Christ to him. The word in the original is διδάσκαλος, *teacher*, the same that Nicodemus addresses to Christ himself in verse 2. And our Lord doubtless sees thousands of Nicodemuses among the modern masters in Israel who need

to be born again that they may see the kingdom of God, and be able to show it to others.

'Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.'—JOHN III. 5.

THE Gospel of John differs in many obvious particulars from the other Gospels. One distinguishing feature is its unity. There are indeed a number of distinct tableaux and conversations; but these are related to one another; they are chosen with reference to a design in the mind of the inspired writer; they successively unfold and illustrate some special aspects of the great truth that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. In the biography which Matthew gives us we are taken from one scene to another, from one set of circumstances, one sort of engagements, one exposition of truth, to others that are widely different, and the only unity is that which belongs to Christ's own character. But John's Gospel is more like a document, written to set forth certain great truths of Christianity, with constant references to statements made and works wrought by Christ, illustrative of those truths. There is a law of continuity easily traceable throughout this wonderful Gospel. In the other Gospels the context lies close to the text; but here all is contextual; the evangelist is constantly illustrating what has gone before. Just as in the Epistle to the Hebrews the apostle puts under contribution the whole of the Old Testament, gathering here, there, and everywhere the testimony which it yields, and working

all up into an essay conspicuous for unity, so the beloved disciple, out of the boundless repertory of our Lord's words, gathers, by the aid of God's Spirit, all that serves to illustrate the end he has in view.

To be born of water and of the Spirit: in considering the meaning of these words, let us begin by looking back into the first chapter. "And John bare record, saying, He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." The Baptist here indicates a remarkable contrast between himself and the Messiah: he baptized with water, but the Messiah should baptize with the Spirit. The point here indicated is of sovereign importance, and is placed by itself; but it does not follow that this whole question of Christian baptism is disposed of by it. Some may leap to the conclusion that it is so disposed of; that all we need to be disciples of Christ is to be wrought upon by the Spirit; that we do not need, as the disciples of John did, to be set apart by some public and conspicuous rite. They who are known as the Friends are content with the first grand announcement; they give its due place to the grand truth that we must be born of the Spirit, and insisting on the contrast between John's baptism and that of Christ, set aside the necessity of water baptism. But here, in the conversation with Nicodemus, our Lord supplements the statement of the Baptist, and teaches that his disciples, while they are made so only by the power of the Spirit, cannot become so without the outward rite, which sets them visibly apart from the world. Nicodemus needed that his atten-

tion should be specially drawn to this characteristic of the new birth, the necessity of openly identifying himself with Christ if he really wished to belong to him; but the reference having been once made, it suffices, and this particular point passes out of sight, in the next statement, That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Men are born of water only as they are justified by works, in the apprehension of James; the faith that does not reveal itself in obedience is dead; living faith, the faith that fructifies in works, is the faith which saves. The faith that does not lead to confession is vain; he is not born of the Spirit who does not acknowledge Christ. In the Greek there is at the beginning of this chapter a connecting particle, requiring us to connect the words with those just before spoken: "For he himself knew what was in man. There was (for instance) a man named Nicodemus." The conversation shows Christ's knowledge of what is in man.

To know what it is to be born of the Spirit we must know the Spirit, what are his offices, what he comes to do.

1. He comes to influence the spirit of man. His sphere of operation is the soul, the thinking, willing, emotional part of man's nature.

2. He influences it according to its own laws, not in violation or disregard of them. He does not directly, arbitrarily make it to be what he would now have it to be; but he has regard to the inalienable endowments which God has bestowed upon it.

3. He is the Spirit of truth, and it is only by the truth that he influences the mind and the heart of man. The

truth of itself cannot change the heart; but neither does the Spirit of himself by a mere fiat change it. The great law of our nature demands that we should be influenced by motives; and in conformity with this law the Spirit moves the heart by means of the truth. He does not constitute himself sovereign by overcoming and binding the will; the will is never freer than when it gives him entrance. He does not forbid the mind to reason; he teaches it to reason rightly.

4. It is, especially, by the truth relating to Christ that he influences and changes the mind. By that truth he condemns it, convinces it of sin, takes away its imagined righteousness; and by it he so reveals the love of God as to make the heart acquiesce in the offers and demands of the Gospel.

5. The Spirit is God. God the Spirit is the all-wise and almighty God working in the realm of spirit, influencing and moulding the hearts of his intelligent creatures. To be born of the Spirit is to be born of God.

If, in order to be a child of God, it is necessary that men be born of water and of the Spirit, it is evident that men are not naturally the children of God. If, as some tell us in these days, all men are children of God, only they have lost the sense of their relationship, and need simply to have this restored, Christ would not have used such language as is here reported. The Gospel, we are told, is that which God in his abounding goodness has given to convince us of that which sin would hide from us. Christ came and died upon the cross for us, that we might discover how much injustice we had done to God in mistrusting him, might ascertain that love which he has towards all his fallen

creatures, his erring children. We are as it were children that have been stolen in infancy, when we were too young to know, and have been nursed and fostered by a stranger; and now, by virtue of the cross, we discover what we are, children of the King. What the doctrine of election is supposed to teach, "once a child always a child," this doctrine teaches concerning all men; their birthright is inalienable.

This doctrine is very insidious. It makes great use of the Gospel, that is, of a portion of it. It harps much upon the love of God; the fatherhood of God, from which even sin cannot separate us; the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, which makes us acquainted with the loving heart of our Father. But it is only a part of the Gospel that it uses. It speaks of the love of God, but not of his holiness, which cast down the angels from heaven because of their sin, and said to Adam, In the day that thou eatest thou shalt die, and keeps saying to his descendants, The soul that sinneth it shall die, and Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them. This subtle doctrine speaks of the sacrifice of Christ as required not by the holiness of God, but by the unbelief of man. They single out the parable of the Prodigal Son, valuing it for what it omits (abundantly stated in other words of Christ) as much as for what it contains. But prodigals can only reach the Father through Christ, who begins by teaching them not that they are the children of God, but, Except they be born of water and of the Spirit, they cannot enter the kingdom of God.

'Verily, verily I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?'—JOHN III. 11, 12.

NICODEMUS came, it would appear, to hear about heavenly things; to be entertained by a description of the unseen world. One sent of God as Christ was, and able to do such wonderful things, would doubtless be able to give such accounts of the angel-peopled heavens as would greatly interest and startle those who had the privilege of hearing them. The rabbins had told Nicodemus many marvellous tales about those worlds of light; his own imagination had pictured to him many beautiful and captivating scenes; but here was one come from God, and accompanied by divine credentials: what a precious opportunity of learning all about the details and characteristics of the worlds where God is seen in his glory. Instead of being thus entertained, the master in Israel is not a little astonished at the somewhat dry, very practical, and yet very doctrinal discourse addressed to him. He did not come to hear about the new birth, or about the doctrine of the Spirit; but the wisdom of God in Christ saw that this was what he needed. And there are many no doubt who would fancy the Bible a good deal more, if it were not so doctrinal and so practical; if it entertained them more with the wonders of other worlds; with accounts of life in Jupiter and Saturn; with description of the angelic hierarchies and the occupations

and delights of heaven. But the message that comes to this world from that relates to the way in which we are to live in this world, and to the change to be wrought in us; the wonder-faculty, like the rest of our nature, must be wrought upon by the Holy Spirit before we can be capable of walking in God's path at all.

"That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." The Spirit himself, like the wind, is unseen; but, like the wind, or air, is sufficiently manifest in his operations. (There is only one word in the Greek for the Spirit and for the wind, or air, or atmosphere, in which subordinately, we live, move, and have our being: a fact more remarkable than many fictions.) "How can these things be?" said Nicodemus. 'How can an unseen Spirit thus mightily influence our spirit?' The question shows him to be without faith; shows him to be unspiritual. Christ's reply is addressed to the state of mind thus divulged.

Let us observe the transition from the singular to the plural. "Verily, verily *I* say unto thee, *We* speak that we do know." Christ, as it were, abdicates for the moment his own peculiar and pre-eminent position as the Sent of God, to class himself with his apostles. He wishes to point out the claims of the truth, when declared by competent witnesses, upon the credence and obedience of men.

We speak what we know; we do not speak to you of what the Spirit is and does in heaven, but of what he is and does upon the earth; of his work in the hearts of men; of the transformations of character wrought by him in the midst of us. The offspring of the Spirit, men who have passed from death unto life, are among us. These

disciples of men will tell you that they were once unregenerate, but have become the children of God by the operation of his Spirit. But even the prophets bear testimony to the Spirit and to his power to renew the heart of man. "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" I am, you say, a teacher come from God; yet you stumble at the first things I tell you. My instruction, to be welcomed of you, must correspond with the ideas and sentiments you already have in your mind, and must build itself up on this as on a foundation. What is this but to affirm that you are yourself taught of God, and thus in a position to challenge my teaching? I must learn of you, and then teach you. Hast thou ascended into heaven? Been there and returned? No man hath done this "but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man who is in heaven."

The Son of man who *is* in heaven: new doctrines, new mysteries.

The question of Nicodemus, "How can these things be?" and the reply of Jesus, "Ye believe not," show that the question was a sceptical one. It proceeded from a spirit of unbelief. And there is many a question put in these days that is simply indicative of unbelief. The questioned truth would, if received, enable the mind to solve many formidable difficulties; but the mind chooses to keep it outside and regard it as a difficulty because it does not harmonise with a great deal of the rubbish outside. Every man who declines to receive the testimony of Christ and of the Bible, saying, How can these things be, these uncommon things never seen in our times? shows that on the whole he

concedes greater authority to his own notions of things than to Christ. He believes in himself rather than in Christ; and thus doing he plainly condemns himself.

Afterwards, speaking of the Spirit, Christ said to his disciples: "Him the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not." It is as though a blind man should say, I will not suffer the physician to approach me to operate upon my eyes, unless I may first see him. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit; and only spirit can recognise the creative Spirit. Blessed is he that believeth. There is the testimony of Christ's disciples, of the Scriptures, of Christ himself. It is a solemn thing for a man to reject this testimony. Christ's words shall be echoed from the judgment, and shall sound loud enough in that day to shake awfully the soul that refused to make way for them by surrender of its own vain fancies.

'Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.'—MATT. XI. 11.

THE popularity of John was apparently declining. Of the multitudes who had once gone to the wilderness to see and hear him, few now occupied themselves about him. They had expected more from his ministry. There was something about him that impressed and stimulated their imaginations. In fearlessness, devotion, and self-denial, he seemed to them another Elijah. They remembered how

Elijah had singly met all the prophets of Baal and all the host of the idolatrous king, and in the name of Jehovah had triumphed over them all. Their country was now subject to an idolatrous power; the engrossing thought among all classes was, Who shall deliver us from the hateful rule of these Gentiles? John the Baptist bore the unmistakable stamp of a prophet of the most high God; what more likely than that God had raised him up for the very purpose of breaking this detested yoke? Evidently, he had all the qualities needed to inspire confidence, and lead to victory the sacramental host of God. But when his influence is at its height, he suddenly but quietly vacates it. He makes way for another; and who is that other? Jesus of Nazareth, whose voice is not heard in the streets, who is no agitator, whose manifest aim is simply to deliver men from their sins and teach them how to suffer. The great excitement regarding John the Baptist passes away. Little hope now of national enfranchisement from him; is he not Herod's captive? And what is this he is now doing? Sending to Jesus to know if he is indeed the coming One, or only another forerunner.

Perhaps even the disciples would have judged this not the fittest moment for an eulogium on John: would have rather judged some reproof of his vacillating thoughts to be demanded. But the magnanimity of Christ rises above this. That the course pursued by Jesus should appear strange to John was natural enough; John shows his entire deference to Christ by submitting his perplexity to him; let Christ speak, this shall suffice. Happy are they who bring their doubts and their perplexities to Christ. Unto such he says: To you it is given to know the mysteries of the king-

dom of heaven. He gives to the messengers of John just the evidences that he gave to everybody else; some works that God has designedly left unfinished, and which all the universe were challenged to finish and could not, Christ, with his creative fiat, finished; the blind saw, the lame walked, the lepers were cleansed, the dead lived.

Both the disciples and the multitude expected of Jesus that he should now say something about their late idol John the Baptist. Our Lord speaks first of the altered state of the people's minds regarding him. Was there any reason for this? Had John changed? His circumstances were changed, but he was faithful to the mission which he had received. If they had been disappointed in him, it was because of their erroneous expectations. The inconstancy was theirs, not his. He was a man of unbending integrity, no reed shaken with the wind; he was a man of self-denial, not to be won from the path of duty by the offers of a king, not a lover of soft raiment; there is then nothing wonderful in the fact that he should be in a dungeon. Had he been of a more pliant temper, had he been more selfish in his aims, his popularity would probably have remained. Is he a prophet? More than a prophet; in fact, a greater hath not risen among those born of women than John.

He is Elijah; he is more than Elijah; more than Moses; more than Isaiah. What constitutes the dignity of a prophet? That he is brought near to God, and commissioned to reveal God. But surely Moses and Isaiah were brought near to God. Yes, but John came nearer. If the Lord seen by Isaiah high and lifted up, and compassed by adoring seraphim, had left the throne, descending its steps

in the form of man, and hand in hand with Isaiah, without seraphim or visible glory, had gone to Isaiah's house to dwell with him, that would have been a more wonderful manifestation. To know God in Christ is the highest of all privileges accorded to man; and this privilege was pre-eminently that of John, among all the prophets of the old dispensation. "Let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exerciseth loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight."

Men imagine that the great Temple of Fame which they have reared is destined to stand for ever. Have not all ages and all nations been associated in the construction of it? Have not the wisest and most cultivated of all times constituted a never-ceasing assembly to determine who shall have statues and altars and tablets in this sublime temple? All around the bases of these statues and these obelisks are there not piled the reverent testimonies of successive ages? Is there not a power in the glance of the very statues sufficient to dishearten any who should dare to lift his voice for their overthrow? The whole human family, the accumulated authority of all mankind, all majesty, and honour and glory of this world, watch about the enshrined and glorified of this Temple, and strike terror to the heart that would reverse the judgments of all time. So think the worshippers of this world's heroes. But the still small voice that came from the lips of Jesus eighteen centuries ago is destined to shake to pieces this Temple of Fame, and to cast from their pride of place all these statues. "Among them that are born of women a greater hath not risen than John

the Baptist." And if any should propose a statue to John, John himself says: "He must increase, but I must decrease; he that cometh from above is above all; he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth; I am not worthy to unloose the latchet of his shoes." "Thou alone art worthy to receive glory, honour, and power; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of all nations and kindreds, and tribes, and tongues."

'Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.'—MATT. XI. 11.

As one star differeth from another star in glory, so prophet differeth from prophet in respect to the fulness of the revelation made to them and through them. Some had but a single message to deliver, delivered it and their lives with it, and a few words contain their record in the Bible; others fill sixty chapters with their prophecies. In admiring the grace bestowed upon them, the measure of the Spirit vouchsafed, we pass from one to another, till we come to him who actually looked upon the Messiah, touched his sacred person, conversed with him, baptized him. What kings and prophets had desired to see and died without the sight of, he saw. He stood where Moses and Elijah had desired to stand; Moses, who was with God in the mount, Elijah, who was caught up to heaven in a chariot of fire, these were not so highly privileged as John the Baptist, who saw God manifest in the flesh. After our mental vision has got a little

used to the contemplation of this lofty and heaven-lit pinnacle of privilege, let us endeavour to comprehend the fact that he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he; that this dispensation of ours begins where the other ends. As Joel had predicted: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit." The very Spirit that gave the ancient prophets all that distinguished them from others should be poured out upon all classes, even upon the least in the kingdom of heaven.

Accordingly the humblest believer has in these days a fulness of knowledge concerning the suffering and risen and glorified Saviour, concerning the way of salvation, the relation of faith and works, the method of sanctification, the walking with God, the Church of the living God, our oneness in Christ and with Christ, the meaning of all Scripture, the world to come, the New Jerusalem, etc. etc., immeasurably beyond anything that was revealed to the Old Testament prophets. The sermon that seems to many in these days stale, flat, and unprofitable, would have overwhelmed with wonder and filled with questions the minds of the most highly favoured of ancient prophets.

The privileges of this dispensation are to be estimated not by the actual experiences of those called Christians, for these are limited by their want of faith, but by the promises, declarations, and invitations of the word of God. We find them in that Magna Charta, the prayer of Christ contained in John xvii.; we find them in the closing conversations of Christ with his disciples; in the Acts of the Apostles,

which describe the Spirit of glory and of God that rested on the first disciples ; in the Epistles ; in the Epistles to the seven Churches ; in the account of the New Jerusalem. For no one can compare the description of the New Jerusalem which cometh down from God out of heaven, having the glory of God and a light like unto a stone most precious, with the promises and invitations of Rev. ii. and iii., without perceiving that the privileges and glorious distinctions of the New Jerusalem are now potentially ours. We are joint-heirs with Christ ; all things are ours ; all things pertaining to life and godliness.

The 3d chapter of 2d Corinthians is full of instruction, and well calculated to give us an exalted idea of what is placed within our reach by the death and resurrection of Christ. "For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory." "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." We all ; even the least in the kingdom of heaven ; according to our faith.

The believer enters into the greatness which Christ has purchased for him, by giving up all futile and fatuous thoughts of his own greatness and goodness ; by recognising his own utter demeritoriousness ; his moral and spiritual beggarliness. But what shall he do for strength and wisdom and righteousness ? Christ becomes to him everything. The mighty chasm that separated his polluted soul from God is bridged over by Christ ; in Christ all the fulness of the Godhead, all treasures of wisdom and knowledge and

power and holiness become his. Christ is his life; for he is dead, and his life is hid with Christ in God; not I, but Christ liveth in me. Invested with Christ's own worthiness and loveliness, he draws nigh to the Father, and all the Father's love to Christ becomes his. He puts on the whole armour of God, and overcomes not such enemies as were vanquished (partly, briefly) by Alexander, Cæsar, and Napoleon, not armies of mere flesh and blood, but the god of this world; overcomes him where he is enthroned, in the heart of unbelief; quenches all those fiery darts whereby he would persuade the young soldier that he has no part or lot in Christ, that God hears not his prayer, that sin is invincible, that the wrath of man is unendurable, that faith is mere imagination, that the kingdom of heaven is only so much tinted vapour hanging unreally in the beams of a setting sun. He learns to say, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me, and who will never leave me nor forsake me. I can win victories that the great men of earth never dreamed of winning,—over unbelief, evil habit, evil desire, selfishness, over prosperity and adversity, over the smiles and the frowns of men, over privation and affluence. I can not merely defend myself from the armies of the enemy, I can make successful assaults upon their camp, and carry off captives. The overthrow and destruction of all those hosts in the great day of the Lord God Almighty shall be accomplished by the same Word that is now with me.' By that same Word shall the new heavens and the new earth appear, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

'For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.'—MATT. XIII. 17.

THERE is a tendency to magnify the privileges of those who lived at a period long anterior to ours. It is generally connected with a very decided disposition to find objects of reverence. In some the principle of veneration has a morbid development; they are only happy when they are mentally and morally at the feet of some one. Veneration is a legitimate and most important faculty of the mind; but we are not to take it for granted that its action is always salutary. It has participated in the damage sustained by all our faculties, in the fall; and until subordinated to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is sure to mislead us. It appears to be radically different from selfishness, and therefore some leap to the conclusion that it must be, in all its exercises, good. But sin is the preference of something finite to the Creator; selfishness is the preference of self, and is just one form of sin; but we may sin as grievously by giving undue honour to some other creature. You may defend it by pleading the merits of this fellow-creature, his superiority to yourself. But he who has commanded you to love Him with all the heart and soul, has solemnly declared that there is none good beside him, that He is the source of all that is admirable, and alone entitled to the honour of it. "What hast thou

that thou hast not received?" And the time of judgment is not yet. The last day will take from a thousand objects the worthiness that man has attributed to them, and many that have been utterly overlooked shall be seen radiant with glory. The seraphim veil their faces: they refuse to be seen of worshippers, that God alone may be exalted. Earth shall have no portrait of them. The four and twenty elders on thrones about the throne of God and of the Lamb fall prostrate, and cast down their crowns, that no one may give honour save unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.

There are myriads in the world, yes, in the Christian world, whose religion is nothing more or less than a morbid veneration. It is a very sweet and comforting thought to them that they are not as other men are, self-honouring and self-seeking; their delight is to humble themselves before the great and good; they are not stiff-necked, they know how to prostrate themselves before that which is worthy of reverence. Humility, reverence, self-abnegation, are precious things, and every way enriching to the mind; but there are counterfeits of these gifts as there are of others. The Spirit of God guides the believer by taking of Christ and showing unto him; His aim first and last is to glorify Christ. The Gospel does not give us bits of the cross and pieces of Christ's apparel, or send us on pilgrimage to the place of his sepulchre, to this day unknown. It does not teach us to prostrate ourselves before the piety of antiquity, or to supplant the image of self that we may enshrine in its place an earthly priest. If we talk of the fathers and make our boast of tradition, and gaze with

awe upon a church fifteen centuries old, and visit the tombs of martyrs, and exalt the power and holiness of the reputed saints of antiquity, the Gospel says to us, "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." "One is your Master, even Christ."

Much of this morbid reverence proceeds from want of faith. "Thou shalt never wash my feet," said Peter. Men are staggered by the offer of God to give them all for nothing; and think it becoming to say, 'We will take only this which lies a little beyond our merit.' This little merit of theirs is (if they but knew it) an insult flung in the face of God. The word is nigh thee, and in that word is all that pertains to life and godliness; nigh to thee, sinner; and the only condition imposed is, that thou shouldst let go all that trashy merit of thine, and take the pearl of great price. Thou thinkest it modesty and lowliness to have so little merit; but it is blasphemous to have *any*. Know thy utter demeritoriousness, and thou wilt know that none but Christ, the Son of God, can wash thy feet. To deny thyself, and have in reverence Chrysostom, Augustine, St. Bernard, Pusey, the Pope, a bishop, a priest, a crumb, a drop, a garment, a house with aisles and arches, a form of prayer, a method of worship, a ritual, a collection of hymns, an organ, a cross, this is not the religion of the Gospel.

Polarity is a tendency to operate in two opposite directions. This is a quality of the minds which are characterised by this morbid veneration. But that which is positive in one direction is negative in another. Accord-

ing to the veneration felt for the objects which it has canonised is the repulsion felt by the mind for others. But it will generally be found that among these repelled objects are many that are dear to Christ, many that can only be rejected with hazard of his love.

When the Son of God was in the world there were men actually engaged in building and garnishing the sepulchres of prophets, under the idea that there was nothing living so holy as the tombs of these dead men; while the divinely inspired words of those prophets, had they heeded them, would have pointed them to the Saviour of the world and the Lord of all, then actually in the midst of them. They heard Christ speak, and saw him perform his marvellous works, and went forth to gather contributions for the holy and meritorious work of adorning the sepulchres of the prophets. Their generation is not extinct. But to whom said Christ, Beware of their leaven? To his disciples, his apostles. Is there any of this leaven with you or with me? Do we esteem the Word of God above thousands of gold and silver? "Is the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, shining in our hearts?"

'Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.'—MATT. XVI. 28.

BEFORE the birth of Christ it was revealed unto Simeon by the Holy Ghost that he should not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ. He saw him as a babe, a mere babe—a visible pledge of the future Christ rather than a

fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies ; still, he was content, and ready to depart in peace.

But the mature Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is now in the midst of his disciples. Are they content ? Have they all their hearts can desire ? Have they nothing more to expect from the future ? There has never yet been a fulfilment of God's promises which has not brought with it new promises. The Alp surmounted brings a new and higher Alp into view. The glory of the present is never permitted long to make us regardless of the future. "Unto him that hath shall be given."

A glance at the context will show that our Lord had been speaking to his disciples of that very distasteful and mysterious subject, his crucifixion, and of the necessity for their fellowship with him in his humiliation and rejection and loss of earthly things. They must take up their cross and follow him ; they must lose their life and all that they deem valuable in the world for his sake. But he shall rise again ; and they too shall participate in his glorious triumph over death and the world. They are not required to surrender the hope of future glory. For a season men may appear to have the victory, fulfiling their heart's desire concerning Christ ; but the Son of man shall come in the glory of the Father, with his angels, and reward all according to the service rendered. But does not this reward seem far away in the shadowy future ? can their faith and hope leap the broad gulf of crucifixion and take hold of anything beyond ? We can imagine how the poor faith of the disciples is staggered by this prospect. What, are we actually to die ? Christ is here with power that subdues

the elements and evil spirits, and even breaks down the tremendous barriers of death; we have been called to the inestimable privilege of following him, assured that he could only lead us to glory and universal victory; and now are we asked to follow him to a shameful death, to lay down our lives as malefactors, and be content to leave our hopes with God till some remote, uncertain time in the future? Christ, the Lord of glory, after having actually come into this world and called us to the knowledge of himself, to sink with us into a pit of oblivion, and all the magnificent promise of this time be swallowed up in darkness like an illuminated cloud at evening? The far future is no reality to us; our natures cannot take hold of anything so misty and undiscernible; reward is no reward unless it meets a conscious want of our soul.

Jesus knoweth our frame. He knows the aliment that our poor faith demands. "Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom;" or, as it is in Mark, "Until they have seen the kingdom of God come with power." While it is true that you must deny yourself, take up your cross, and lose your life for my sake, be assured that, in a most important sense, a soul-satisfying sense, some of you shall not taste of death till they shall have seen the glorious advent of my kingdom.

In what sense? We note that the account of Christ's transfiguration follows immediately. It was the next great event that occurred. Peter, whom our Lord found occasion so severely to rebuke on the occasion when the words of our text were spoken, was one of the favoured ones that

saw the transfiguration of Christ's person on the holy mount; and many a long year afterwards he referred to this privilege in his Second Epistle (i. 16-18): "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory . . . when we were with him in the holy mount." What we ourselves saw of the power and coming, the mighty and majestic advent of Christ, that we made known unto you. It would seem that Peter had in his mind the remarkable scene in Daniel vii., where one like the Son of man comes with the clouds of heaven, and is brought near to the Ancient of days, and receives dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him. When the disciples heard from the cloud of glory the voice, saying, "This is my beloved Son, hear him," it was made as plain to them as anything could make it, that Jesus was invested with absolute supremacy over all dominions. All the world should one day see and know it; but in the meantime they were permitted to be witnesses of the august and sublime recognition by the Father of his all-glorious and all subduing Son. So, when Christ rose from the dead, he himself bore new testimony, saying, "All power in heaven and on earth is given unto me." In fact, this is what his resurrection signifies. With Christ believers are crucified; with him they rise; with him they go forth conquering and to conquer.

The kingdom of Christ differs from all others in various particulars: we here mention but one. His subjects do his will, not from fear of penalties, not from the hope of

extrinsic reward, but from love. His will is theirs. He reigns in their affections. Imagine the world prostrate at his feet because of the revelation of his power, and ready to do what is required because of the peril of disobedience; is that the kingdom of Christ? That is the sort of honour that the kings of earth value; but the Prince of the kings of the earth will none of it. That is not his kingdom. Look rather at the gathering of the disciples on the day of Pentecost and thenceforward. The Spirit of glory and of God rested upon them. Their faces shone with joy unspeakable. They loved one another with pure hearts fervently, with Christ's own love. No man counted anything his own. Each sought the interest and happiness of all. They were kings and priests unto God. They were filled with the Holy Ghost and with faith; even with all the fulness of God. They smiled at the prospect of suffering for Christ's sake; victory sat upon their brow when men were stoning them to death, or rather to rest. Then they who had heard the promise saw the fulfilment, saw the Saviour coming in his kingdom. "Coming;" a present participle that regards the future.

Are there those standing among us who shall not see death till they see the Son of man coming into his kingdom with majesty and supremacy, that every eye shall be constrained to recognise? Let us hasten the coming of the glorious day, by hasting to make way in our own heart for the advent of the Prince of Peace, by surrendering ourselves, body, soul, and spirit, to the direction of the blessed omnipotent Spirit, whose unapproachable prerogative it is to glorify Christ.

'Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme ; but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation.'—MARK III. 28, 29.

THE object of our Lord in this statement is not to lay down the law concerning the forgiveness of sins, but to declare an exception to that law.

We have abundant testimony in Scripture to the fact that God forgives the sins of those who, repenting, believe on Christ, the propitiation for our sins and for those of the whole world. Whosoever will may take of the water of life freely ; his faith suffices ; none shall be cast out. It being made so certain that no believing suppliant shall be rejected, we infer that the thing which hinders the forgiveness of those who sin against the Holy Ghost is something which hinders their coming to God with a contrite and believing heart.

One possessed with a devil, blind and dumb, had been brought to Jesus. Mere blindness is in itself a terrible calamity ; to be without the godlike faculty of speech is to be but a fragment of humanity ; how much greater the eclipse of mind, the extinction of the moral and rational powers ; above all, when this is caused by the presence of an evil spirit, an unseen and deadly foe encamped in the very citadel of your being, and using what faculties are left to you for the purpose of warring against you ! But imagine

all these calamities in one, and what a fearful combination of miseries, what accumulated trophies of destruction! It is like a triumphal pillar made of the molten cannon won on many battle-fields. Satan seems to have been permitted to show how near to chaos he could bring the wonderful essence which God created in his own image. But the fiat of Jesus annihilates the manifold shackles in which Satan had bound his poor prisoner. He opens his eyes upon this beautiful earth, the blue of heaven, the clouds and the mountains; the portals of hearing are thrown open that the sounds of animated nature may enter in and submit their report; his understanding awakens; love, joy, and hope spring up in his heart; a harmony reveals itself between his being and the whole exterior creation; it lives to him and he to it. Not more wonderful was the Divine power which in the beginning formed man out of the dust of the earth. But it would seem that there is a depth of unbelief more profound and impenetrable than the deep dungeon from whence this poor demoniac had been delivered. The Pharisees witnessed the sublime deliverance. They did not dispute the reality of the miracle. Gladly would they have done so, but the facts were patent, stubborn, unshunnable. That the man had been an utter ruin, blind, deaf, possessed, could not be gainsaid; that he now saw, heard, and reasoned, was manifest to all; that this prodigious transformation had been wrought by the simple word of Jesus no one could deny. They fully conceded all this, and their testimony is available for the sceptic of this day. But they took their stand upon something that a modern sceptic would be the first to laugh to scorn. They said: "This

fellow doth not cast out devils but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils." Such was the explanation given by those who claimed to be the authorised interpreters of God's word and providence, and who were looked up to by the people as really empowered to adjudicate in matters of religion. They said to the people: 'This Jesus is a vile impostor; professing to be of God and to be clothed with power from on high, he is an emissary from hell, a legate from the realm of darkness, and the power that accompanies him is the power of that arch-enemy of God and of all righteousness, Beelzebub. The work you have seen is Satanic; and this man Jesus is nothing but Satan in a human form, the incarnation of all wickedness seeking to beguile you into the idea that he is from God.'

Jesus, with infinite condescension, replies to these abominable charges. In his reply he says (Matt. xii. 28), "I cast out devils by the Spirit of God." These words give us a clew to the meaning of those which we have placed at the head of this meditation.

He distinguishes between the Son of man and his works, and the Holy Ghost and his works. He might be viewed as a mere man, and there might be criticism of his conduct with reference to its blameworthiness or praiseworthiness. We know indeed that he was God manifest in the flesh; that in him was all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; that the Spirit of God was concerned in all that he did. But this was not, and could not be understood at the first. He came in the likeness of sinful flesh; it was gradually shown to men wherein he differed from sinful humanity; his purity, his moral perfection, his divinity came gradually to

light. And just according to the fulness of the revelation was the responsibility of those who witnessed it. He teaches the Pharisees, and he teaches the men of our own time, that there is in and through him a manifestation of the Divine power and glory so bright and unequivocal, that whosoever shall sin grievously against his own convictions by attributing this manifestation to a spirit of evil, sins away his own hope. Such a man may be an unbeliever with regard to diabolic agency; no matter; he assigns to the work of Christ the basest origin with which he is acquainted.

For we are plainly taught that man is absolutely dependent upon the Holy Spirit for salvation. Only this Divine Spirit can regenerate him, can inspire him with saving faith, can give him victory over sin. To blaspheme against the Holy Spirit is to refuse to know the Spirit in those acts by which He most signally reveals himself, and by means of which he is seeking to make an avenue to our heart. Before he enters the heart of the sinner, he displays his Divine and beneficent power in one way or another, but in a way well worthy to inspire the sinner with faith, and lead him to fling down the drawbridge that this glorious person may enter in. But where these bright and worthy tokens are shown to a man, and the only response is calumny, contempt, hostility, then the sinner breaks down as it were the bridge by which his Deliverer might have come to him.

In order that those who are now alive may get the full benefit of the instruction contained in this passage, and be on their guard against the hope-destroying sin here spoken of, it is necessary for them to consider what special displays

of the power and grace of the Holy Spirit have been made before their eyes, and give heed to the appeals thus made to their faith. There is a Holy Ghost; this world is the theatre of his operations. Have you noticed his work? among your acquaintances are there those who were once ungodly, spiritually blind, religiously dumb, dead in trespasses and sins, who have been transformed into self-denying, humble, godly, loving followers of Jesus, fruitful branches in the true vine? If so, how have you treated this mighty operation of the Spirit of God, this appeal to your faith made by a Divine Spirit? Harden not your heart against the "Verily, verily" of him who is alone competent to pronounce concerning forgiveness, since it is only through him that forgiveness comes to any.

'Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country.'—Luke iv. 24.

It is probable that Christ, in saying this, was merely repeating a well-known proverb. The instances in which prophets failed to find honour among their own people, and had to go abroad to be heeded, were of such frequent occurrence that men had been disposed to trace in them the operation of a general law. Our Lord's adoption of the saying shows that it rests on a basis of truth. He did not mean that an instance of a prophet appreciated by his own people was a thing unknown; but that the contrary was generally the case. And it is not difficult to see why it was the case.

The prophets were ordinary men before they were ap-

pointed to the prophetical office; sinful men, like the rest of the race; and known to their fellow-men in this capacity before they began to speak in the name of the Lord. The Spirit of God moved upon their hearts, brought them into hallowed relations with God, and fitted them for the work of making known his will; but their fellow-townsmen could not forget the long years during which they had been associating with them on terms of companionship, had been engaged with them in a multitude of pursuits, had been identified with them in all essential particulars. Looking upon the prophet they would call to remembrance this former fellowship, and would ask why this one should have been chosen for the office rather than any of them. Men are very reluctant to see one of their own number, not designated for it by themselves, chosen to be clothed with authority over them. They are ready to say to him, Physician, heal thyself: hast thou less need of healing than the rest of us? Thus Moses was rejected of the Israelites when he first offered himself to them as a deliverer; only after he had spent forty years in a foreign country did they consent to receive him.

Our Lord was in Nazareth "where he had been brought up." They that were listening to him in the synagogue had known him from early years; were well acquainted with Mary his mother, with Joseph, and with the other members of that humble household; they had known Jesus and Joseph as carpenters, had actually employed them to make this or that article of furniture, to execute this or that repair; had money dealings with them. Now, men were talking about this Jesus as though he were some great

prophet, more than a prophet, the Messiah even, Son of God, heaven knows what all; as though he had some extraordinary powers the like of which no man possessed, some divine wisdom casting into the shade all the wisdom of the most renowned Rabbis. It was enough to make a man go wild to hear of such pretensions. 'Has he dropped from the skies, this Jesus? Has he descended in a fiery chariot? Has he come from the ends of the earth? Is he a stranger? Who is this but Jesus, our townsman, the carpenter, brought up among us, perfectly well known to all of us Nazarenes? Before they begin to tell such wild tales, why do not men come to us and learn what we are able to tell them? It would be strange indeed if he had miraculous powers and we knew nothing about it; if he had divine wisdom and we had not found out about it; if he had extraordinary virtues and we had not become acquainted with them. If he had any special call from heaven, why did he never venture to speak about it to us? If he has authority from heaven to take up the mantle of the ancient prophets, why did he not tell us about it? Ah, we should have soon given him his answer. He did well to go away to the Jordan, among strangers, to hear voices from heaven. A very likely thing that the well-beloved Son of God should live to be thirty years of age doing the work of a carpenter in our town, mixing with us as one of us, and never giving us the least inkling of his amazing dignity!'

But oh, ye excited Nazarenes, tell us if you can of anything done or spoken by Jesus, the son of Mary, during all these years, inconsistent with the truth of God? Can you

charge home upon him any instances of pride, covetousness, selfishness, malice, ambition, vindictiveness, meanness? While it is true that he may have offended your prejudices by disregarding some of the traditions which some of the Rabbis and Pharisees made so much of, and that he neglected a great deal that passes current with you as religion, can you point to a single instance in which he made light of the will of God revealed in the Scriptures? He was not perhaps a good neighbour in the sense of running with you to the excess of riot, going hand in hand with you in sports and pursuits that were not seemly; but can you mention any instance in which he omitted to succour the needy and the distressed, to sympathise with the poor and the afflicted? Did any of you ever persuade him to do what he believed to be wrong? Has he not, in a word, conducted himself with all meekness and holiness, and purity and kindness and faithfulness?

Ah, there is reason to believe that the faithfulness of Jesus offended more than his humility propitiated. In one way or another, by his walk at all events, he had reproved the ungodliness and unrighteousness of his fellow-citizens; their anger had been elicited; they had censured him for his disregard of the claims of religion as set forth by the scribes and elders and Pharisees, and as recognised by all; for presuming, he Jesus the carpenter, to be wiser than all the world. And now the Jesus whom they had thus censured, and by whom they had been thus unpleasantly reproved, this same Jesus stands before them and asks them to receive him as an ambassador from heaven—asks them to believe that the Holy One of God has been living ever so

many years among them, not only unknown, but slighted and condemned. Away with him, away with him! Such a one is not fit to live.

So, rising up in their wrath, they attempted to drag him to a neighbouring precipice, that they might dash him to pieces. But he passed through the midst of them, and went his way.

'Verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation.'—MARK VIII. 12.

ON more than one occasion certain of the Scribes and Pharisees sought of Jesus a sign from heaven. First they said that it was by the power of Beelzebub that he wrought his marvellous miracles; then they asked of him a sign from heaven, just as though the signs given were not from heaven. They asked him in fact to concede that their explanation of his miracles was the correct one, by renouncing this sort of evidence, and giving them the sort of testimony that they would indicate. It seemed to them a very small thing, a thing by no means demonstrative of the working of God, to be delivering poor men, beggars and such, from blindness, deafness, leprosy, and various ailments. Who cared whether such people were cured or not? What difference did it make that there should be a few less, suffering from these infirmities? But now if some creature the like of which one had never seen, half horse, half bird, should come down from heaven; or if some sentence should appear written on the face of the skies in dazzling letters; or if a goodly company of angels should descend from

heaven and hover over us, and tell us plainly that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah; if these or something similar that we should designate might be wrought before us, then should we be ready to acknowledge the truth of Christ's mission. Did not Gideon ask for a particular sign, the sign of his own choice, and get it; and did he not ask for a second, and obtain it?

'Yes, but Gideon was a believer; a notable element of difference, this. And he was singled out from all the community for a special mission, and it was fitting that he should have special testimony. But I, Jesus, am sent to the entire Jewish people, and the credentials needed are those that will commend themselves to men generally as divine. What is wanted is such a display of the power of God as shall testify to men that I am from above. You wish that power to be divorced from beneficence; you wish for something portentous, that shall not do any one any good. But God is what he is, and is true to himself in all his work, and the miracles chosen by him are such as illustrate all his perfections. My disciples once angrily wished that fire should fall from heaven and destroy men. Would this content you? Yes, if it destroyed your enemies. But the Son of man is not come to destroy but to save, and his miracles should be in harmony with his mission. It cannot be safely left to you to indicate what God shall do with his power. When you shall bring us those who are able to open the eyes of the blind, to unstop the ears of the deaf, to heal the leper, and to raise the dead, by a word, then may you with some propriety demand from me more certain displays of Divine power than these. But since I entered upon

my ministry, all pretenders to superhuman powers have fled from my path ; not one of your children has come forward to do any work like my works. Go, seek out some adulterous woman who has left the home of her husband and her children, and gone off with a paramour ; try to prove to her that her husband is worthy, and that she should go back to him in sackcloth and ashes ; where is the proof that she will not laugh you to scorn ? And what have we here but an adulterous generation ; one that has departed from the living God ; made void his word by its traditions ; eager to secure to itself the honour that cometh from man ; turning religion into an engine for self-advancement. The point is this : There is utter antagonism between your will and the will of God brought near to you in me, and while you can possibly avoid it you will cling to your will and reject his. But there is a possibility of avoiding it ; you have simply to be dissatisfied with whatever evidence is given, and to demand evidence of a different character. So that it matters little what sign is given you ; you can conceive of something greater, at all events different, and thus neutralise all the testimony offered. Wherefore then should a sign be given to this generation ? The simple fact that it refuses to recognise the abounding evidence furnished by my gracious miracles is proof of a state of mind not to be overcome by evidence.'

The proofs which the Scribes and Pharisees sought to stigmatise as inadequate, the miracles that seemed insignificant to that adulterous generation, seem to this adulterous nineteenth century incredibly great. The men of this day are staggered by the greatness of the supernatural element

in these works. They would listen to Christ better if he would let alone cleansing the lepers and raising the dead. The supernatural, the Divine is too clearly marked in all these miracles.

Yet there have been sceptics who desired a sign. Lord Herbert of Cherbury wrote a book against the credibility of the Scriptures, and then on his knees asked God for a sign that he should publish this book; asked God for a miracle to justify him in rejecting the miracles and grace of the Saviour; and gazing fixedly into the heavens imagined that he saw the desired sign; the camel-like cloud became like a whale; this or something similar was quite enough, tallying as it did with his strong inclination, to outweigh the mighty proofs of the Gospel. So thousands in these days, having no faith that could be satisfied with the promises of Christ, have yielded a portentous credulity to Spiritualism. Some find the sign they seek in one direction, some in another, according to the character of their minds, the tendency of their thoughts; this teacher is to some a sign, that preacher is a sign from heaven to others; this and that writer to others. To millions the priest is all the sign they want, and whatsoever he does is miraculous.

When the Scribes and Pharisees saw Christ on the cross between two thieves, they exclaimed, Here is our sign! What more do we need? heaven itself testifies that it has no part or lot in this man; it lets him go down to everlasting night. Does it? wait three days; wait till Pentecost; now indeed you have a sign from heaven; do you submit to it?

'Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.' —Matt. xvii. 20.

The figure called antithesis is one that our Lord frequently used. The least and greatest objects are singled out and placed in contrast, either to indicate an impossible relation (the camel and the eye of the needle), or to intimate that the power is not in the apparent instrumentality (the seed-like faith and the mountain) or to express development (the mustard-seed and the great tree). Another instance is the stumbling of the little one contrasted with the descent of the offender to the very bottom of the sea. Again, pearls and swine.

A little before our Lord had expressed the greatness of the work of faith in contrast with the feebleness of the instrument, when Peter, moved by "my Father who is in heaven," had recognised Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God; "Thou art Peter," said Jesus, "and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

The disciples had not succeeded in delivering the poor demoniac boy from his enemy. Christ and the three most advanced disciples were away, upon the mount of Transfiguration. The remaining nine were, it may be, beset with troublesome thoughts not favourable to the exercise of faith. 'Why has Jesus left us? Whither has he gone?

How long will he remain? Forty days and nights? Why should he have taken Peter and the sons of Zebedee, and not us? Are they being initiated into the mysteries of the kingdom, while we sit here neglected and forgotten? What special merit is there in those three? Did we not leave all to follow him? Is this only the beginning of mysterious withdrawals? Is the Master going to leave us often in this way? Might we not as well be catching fish in the sea of Galilee?'

Very unprofitable thoughts these; not unprofitable merely, but harmful. Has Jesus forgotten you? Is his care only for the three? Far from it. See this company, bringing to you a much afflicted boy to be healed. Christ has provided that you should have work to do in his absence, work of a very exalted character. He is putting great honour upon you; commissioning you to do his own choicest work; to perform in his name a miracle that shall be like life from the dead not only to this poor boy, but to his loving and sorrowing parents. Ah, what a pity that this company should arrive at a juncture when your own minds are invaded by thoughts so unworthy. If they had found you earnestly praying, contending with the adversary at the throne of grace! But the thoughts that are commending themselves to you are themselves Satanic; how shall you be able to cast out Satan?

They failed: made the attempt and failed: drew forth the name of Christ like a sword from its scabbard, and all the multitude looked to see what the temper of this blade might be, whether it had really the power to cut the cords by which Satan was so defiantly leading this young man

captive, and to send the prince of darkness howling, or not. Much better that they had left the sword in its scabbard. They smote with it, but in vain. The enemy only jeered them the more insultingly, for the attempt and the discomfiture. The mighty works wrought by Jesus were all forgotten now. This one defeat was like the turning of the tide of fortune.

'O faithless generation,' said Christ when he came; 'how how long shall I be with you and suffer you? Are you so little prepared yet for my departure that is shortly to be? The moment I leave you, does the entire superstructure of faith, so slowly and laboriously upreared, topple to the ground? Do you not know that I am to ascend on high one of these days, leaving you to fight the good fight of faith with a world lying in wickedness? Are you still such mere babes that I cannot withdraw for a few hours, but consternation seizes you, and faith and hope spread their wings?'

"Why could not we cast him out?"—Because of your unbelief. He needed to be cast out of you. And this kind goeth not out save by much prayer and fasting. Putting all together, it is evident that much prayer and much self-denial are needed in order that faith may get the ascendency within us, and this ascendency it must have before it can utter itself in noble works for God. Self-indulgence wars against the soul and hinders the up-springing of faith. The deeds of the body must be mortified. There must be faith to begin with, otherwise self-mortification will only tend to intensify our inward complacency; there must be faith that God has great blessings which he is ready to bestow upon

us; there must be hungering and thirsting after these blessings. It is prayer, true, earnest, persistent prayer, that shall get us this great increase of faith that we seek; and in order to this prayer there must be great watchfulness against all indulgences that disfavour the growth of a spirit of prayer; fasting is the repudiation of all such indulgences, mental, social, physical, be they what they may.

"As a grain of mustard-seed." The contrast is not between the faith and the unbelief. It is not as though our Lord had said, No matter how much unbelief is in you, if there is a spark of faith in your heart; a drachm of faith will save you though a thousand pounds of unbelief were dragging you down. No; the contrast is between the faith and the vastness of the work which it accomplishes. For what is faith? It is simply giving way to God, and letting his might and majesty have free course through our will and affections. As though a man had piled a great many bags of sand against a door to keep it from being opened; let him take these away, the door will open, light, air, the physician, be free to enter. Their unbelief kept the door closed by which the Divine power would have entered and wrought gloriously.

Faith is cessation from self: from self-reliance, self-interest; it is letting God be true. Think not that there must be in the heart a mighty consciousness of the Divine power, in order that that power may be mightily manifested through us. The word of faith is nigh thee, in thy heart and in thy mouth; a still small voice is the voice of the Spirit.

The faith which overcomes is the faith which recognises

God as he is, which delights in his will, and seeks above all things the accomplishment of that. "Though I have faith to remove mountains, and have not charity," says Paul, "it would profit nothing." Let our will be coincident with that of God, and then our faith will simply be the opening of a door by which the same glorious power that was in Christ will come into the world, and make the wilderness to blossom as the rose.

'Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.'—MATT. XVIII. 3.

THIS language was addressed to the disciples. The answer did not at all harmonise with the state of mind in which, on this occasion, they had come to him. No solicitude to know who should enter or be excluded from the kingdom of heaven had troubled their minds; a very different question had occupied them: Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? A question that has still a good deal of interest for many. It takes generally this form: Who is greatest in the Church on earth? If I am not, is not my minister? If he is not, is not my denomination the greatest? Is not our mode of worship the most seemly and beautiful? Do not the great and the fashionable belong to our Church? In the congregation that I am connected with, am I not held in reputation, looked up to?—not for piety perhaps, but for respectability or wealth; for even the much piety of a poor or obscure man is not worthy of consideration compared with the little piety of one that has

social distinction. If honours or offices are given to others before me, this is a thing to be resented and resisted.

But such do not come to Christ with their complaints or requests of this kind. Yet it is possible that some do come to Christ, asking to be preferred to others, and advanced to places of influence; they say to themselves, 'We want influence that we may use it for Christ, not for ourselves.' Let such take great heed that a deceitful heart plays them no trick.

There are doubtless some, however, whose thoughts flow in a very different channel. 'Who is a greater sinner than I have been? Who has had more forgiven him than I have? Who is more indebted to Divine love? Who ought to be more fired with gratitude, who more fully consecrated? Who, more than I, ought to be content with the lowest place, the meanest lot, the greatest privations? Shall I, the chief of sinners, ever be guilty of murmuring in whatever place my Lord may put me? Shall envy ever find a habitation in me? Shall I have anything more to do with pride? Shall I think myself too good to wait upon any Christian brother or sister? Should I not count it an unspeakable privilege to be permitted to do good to any of the household of faith? If Christ has any work from which others would naturally shrink, should I not be glad to be assigned to it?'

They who are thus disposed show that they have been converted and become as little children. They came to Christ with a mind that was as a *tabula rasa*, that he might write his judgments there. They abandoned their old life with all its vain accumulations of imagined merit and

human strength, and earthly wisdom, and came to Christ to be fashioned over again. They had tried their own theory of life, and found it issuing in death ; crest-fallen and deeply-humbled they came back to the starting-point again, to take up God's theory and follow that.

There is something very startling in this declaration of Christ. If he had said, 'Except ye be converted and become as the angels of God, ye shall not enter,' we should not have been so much surprised. But instead of requiring us to put on angelhood, he requires us to put off our humanity as we know it, to put off our manhood, and become as little children, as those that are just on the threshold of life. It is what we have that is our hindrance. How shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of heaven ? We must strip ourselves of the spoils of life ; must renounce our merit, our works of righteousness, our superiority to others, our wisdom, our strength, our wealth, all in which we have trusted ; must be converted from our own goodness ; must be as little children, to be educated in the school of Christ.

As little children with respect to docility. But mark you, not docility to this or that man, not docility towards a priest, it is docility towards Christ. It is he that is to furnish subjects for his own kingdom, to determine who shall walk with him. We throw overboard what we have learnt from men and from our own vain hearts, and decree that nothing shall pass current in the realm of our thoughts and affections but that which bears the stamp of the King.

As little children with respect to faith. Not faith in anything that any one calling himself Christ's shall tell us ;

but faith in Christ as our own very Teacher. We discard all self-faith. We know that there is no goodness in us; nothing on which we can rely for acceptance with God, or for the conflict of life. As little children confide in parental care, take no thought for the morrow, live by faith, so Christians.

As little children with respect to a sense of need. They feel that they are greatly lacking in wisdom and knowledge and strength and courage, that they have everything to learn; so it is with Christians. What can a little child do all by itself in this great selfish world? Can it earn its own bread, put strength into its own little hands, fight its own battles? No, it needs one that has strength, wisdom, love, and invincible patience. So with the converted man; and it is in Christ that he finds this perfect complement of his own insufficiency. He needs to be taught the art of so praying as to obtain the fulfilment of the promises; an art not acquired in a day. He needs to be taught to recognise the approach of the tempter, and see through all his disguises. He needs to be taught to speak to his fellow-men in such a way as to win them to Christ. He feels that with reference to all that constitutes true manhood in the sight of God, with reference to the fruit of the Spirit and the armour of God, he is but a babe, and has a vast amount of progress to make. If any man be in Christ, the same is a new creature; old things are passed away, and all things are become new.

'Verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.'
—Matt. xviii. 13.

Lost of God! Is it possible that one of God's creatures should be lost? The universe is vast, and it is a very simple matter for a creature to get beyond the limits within which it is at home, and wander darkling. A simple matter to lose the power of self-direction, and enter a region where what we know and what we see are in contradiction. But lost to God! how shall this ever be? The universe is vast; but whither shall we flee from God's Spirit? All creation is but as a speck of dust in the palm of his hand. Shall we ever wander to a region where the omniscience of God shall not compass us about like the atmosphere, and where we shall not live and move and have our being in all his perfections?

The Divine perfections may compass us about and interpenetrate us, and yet we may be lost to God. The blind man is lost to the light of the sun, though it be perpetually descending in a mighty torrent all about him; the deaf man is lost to the music of the grove and of the human voice, to the artillery of heaven and the mimic thunder of earth. The sensualist is lost to all that is refining and elevating in woman; the drunkard is lost to all considerations of his own good and the good of others; he that committeth sin is the servant of sin; the transgressor has departed from the living God; unbelief has destroyed the communication between him and God; he is lost to God.

Lost to God, inasmuch as he is without the knowledge of the true God. Whatever knowledge he had, sin has vitiated it; like a drop of fiery and fatal acid in purest water, quickly corrupting the whole. Lost to God, inasmuch as the will of God is displaced for his own will; he is become a god unto himself, and has substituted a decalogue of his own for that which God gave; where God wrote Do not, he has written Do. Lost to God, inasmuch as he has lost the sense of dependence upon God, and is under the sad delusion that he is sufficient unto himself. Lost to God, inasmuch as he is now the victim of a deceitful heart, that knows how to palm off upon him all manner of lies about all things to which his moral nature stands related. Lost to God, since he is without the sense of God's love, and consequently without the conception of true happiness. And finally, he is lost to God, seeing that he is utterly without the faculty of self-restoration. No experience of the bitter evils of his own way will of itself suffice to restore harmony between him and God. God, in his infinite wisdom, has seen good to extend to man the amplest opportunity of showing how far he could in his own strength and by the light of nature climb heavenward; and lo, the highest heaven to which, under the most favourable combination of circumstances possible, he was able to climb, was Olympus with its Jupiter, Mars, Venus, Bacchus, and the rest,—instead of heaven, to a painted and gilded hell.

Alas! the world is full of the lost. And these all have hold of one another in such a way, that to the gravitation of one you must add that of all the rest, to know the ruin of each. The lost are as many as Christ came into the

world to call; as many as he commanded his Gospel to be preached to. So it appears that they are not lost to God in the sense that God has lost his interest in them. The Divine perfections make it impossible that God should ever make light of sin, or deal with sinners in a way to disguise his infinite and undying hatred of sin. As the blissful destiny of all beings is bound up in the Divine will, the violation of that will is an onslaught on all the happiness of all creatures, and requires a tremendous expression of wrath from a God of love. In Christ the wisdom of God has solved all the problems of the case. If the salvation of the sinner awakens such incomparable joy in the Divine Recoverer, how fearful must have been the loss from which he is recovered!

Not merely the Shepherd but the ninety and nine rejoice in the recovery of the wanderer. They praise God continually for all that he is to them; but when the lost one is brought back they gain a new discovery of the depths of that love which constitutes all their happiness. The sinner tells the angel what the angel could never by himself have learned. Once saved, does God's interest in us diminish? This is not what the Saviour teaches. He has in mind particularly the Pharisee. He reasons with him on his own ground. You think that you need no repentance; have always dwelt under the shadow of God's wing. If this be so, then surely you ought to know that God delighteth in mercy, and rejoiceth in the salvation of the lost. And if he has manifested himself to you, it is that in you he may be manifested to those that know him not. Even in blessing you he thought of the unblest.

'Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.'—MATT. XVIII. 18.

THE declaration previously made to Peter alone is here made to the apostles generally. In the first instance, the context intimately connects the promise with the exercise of faith in Christ. In the present instance the context has special reference to the decision of the Church regarding an offending member; also to the offering up of united prayer; finally to the presence of Christ in the midst of his people. The sum of the whole is this: Where there is a body of united believers, Christ himself is in the midst of them to guide them in their decisions; according to the measure of their faith and consecration is the will of Christ made known to them and declared by them; their decisions, thus prompted by Heaven, shall be ratified in heaven. The Holy Spirit is given for the very purpose of making known the judgments of God, and getting them expressed in the words and ways of the believers; and God the Father will not disown the teaching of God the Spirit.

In the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles there is a great deal of binding and loosing. In Galatians, Romans, and Hebrews we find Paul very zealously loosing bonds which had been imposed for fifteen centuries. The bonds of the ceremonial law, the least of which no man had been privileged to loose before the Christian dispensation came, he boldly and remorselessly gave to the winds. The

bondage which made it impossible for the Jews to have intercourse with the Gentiles on fellowly terms, the apostles took away. The obligation to offer sacrifices which had continued from the beginning of the world was annulled. And in all the Epistles we have the obligations of the Christian plainly and authoritatively set forth, and no one that believes in Christ doubts that all these have been ratified in heaven. It was the office of the apostles to unloose the bonds of the Jewish Sabbath, and to bind the people of God to the observance of the Christian Sabbath.

Our Lord saw fit to accomplish the stupendous work of substituting the Christian for the Jewish dispensation, not personally, but by means of his disciples; and it was therefore necessary that they should be constituted plenipotentiaries, and clothed with unquestionable authority. It was to be made evident to all who were morally capable of receiving the evidence, that they had unrestricted power to bind and to loose; it had to be made fully manifest that Christ was with them, the Spirit of God in them, the truth of God declared by them. Who is sufficient for these things? they asked. Where is the man whom it becomes, by wisdom of his own, to set aside the sacred commands of God himself? The zeal of the entire Jewish nation stretched like a rampart before them, forbidding them to lift a finger against the everlasting decrees of God; it was necessary clearly to establish the fact that Christ, of God, was made unto them strength and wisdom and righteousness; that he was with them always, even unto the end of the world.

Wert thou once oppressed with a painful sense of obligation, with a deep sense of sin, with an insupportable

sense of the Divine displeasure? And did there come an hour when thy spirit rejoiced with joy unspeakable in the assurance that all its sins were blotted out, that the loving favour of God was thine, that Christ was thy friend for ever, that none would be able to separate thee from the love of God in Jesus Christ? Well, how came that hour to thee? How was this mighty deliverance effected? By what instrumentality didst thou escape from darkness to light? An evangelist met me; he told me of my sins, my danger, my need, and of the way of salvation opened up in Christ; I received his words into my heart, and was saved. Were the words his indeed? They were first spoken by the apostles and prophets; holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Were the words theirs indeed? The words that spake peace to thy soul, that took away thy sins, that brought thee to God, whose were these mighty words? Ah, they were the words of Christ, the words of God. I heard the voice of Jesus say, Come, take my yoke upon you, learn of me, and find rest; I came to him and found the rest. Hence is it evident that the way in which Christ gave to his apostles power to bind and power to loose was by giving them his word, and by sending them to the sinner, and by sending along with them the Holy Ghost to make the word effectual in the heart of the sinner.

Bonds that were loosed by the apostles, some in our days are seeking to bind again; and bonds that were imposed by them some are seeking to unloose. Liberty conceded is rejected; and liberty is claimed that was never conceded. Many are clamouring for a liberal Christianity that the

apostles knew nothing about; for a Christianity that shall allow them to conform to the world in expenditure and style and deference to fashion and amusement; for a Christianity that shall spare them the necessity of telling their associates unpleasant things about their spiritual state; for a Christianity that will supply them with excuses for all sinners, and with hope for the multitudes who die in their sins; for a Christianity which will give them the privilege of sitting in judgment on the Scriptures, and deciding for themselves what is authoritative and what is not; in a word, for a Christianity which will wall up the strait gate, and cause the broad road to lead no longer to destruction, but to life. But there is a little flock that hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, speaking to them by those whom he has chosen and inspired and commissioned; and the voice of a stranger will they not hear.

'Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.'—MATT. XIX. 23.

THE variety in the reports of the same incident made by the different evangelists, so far from affording a ground of cavil, has always been a valuable aid in interpretation. Here we have a rich man; in another Gospel a man having goods, or substance; and further, we are told in Mark that it is a man trusting in his wealth who finds it so stupendously difficult to enter the kingdom of heaven. One reports more fully here, another there; one gives prominence to this, another to that feature of the narrative. Our Lord, in

repeating his words, almost always varied them ; for there is scarcely an idea that does not allow of considerable diversity in the expression ; and a hundred translators of the Greek Testament, equally well acquainted with the Greek, and equally acquainted with the English, would utterly fail (without concert) to give two precisely similar versions of the same chapter, though all might be excellent.

But the incident which led Jesus to make the remark above cited itself explains the remark. We see what is meant by the rich man. The rich young ruler who came to Christ with so much *empressement*, eager to be told what he should do to inherit eternal life, was advised to part with his wealth, and take Christ instead. The question is, Where is your faith ? What has your confidence ? What do you chiefly cling to as the means of blessing ? Eternal life is here present in Christ ; he that hath the Son hath life ; he that hath not the Son, though he had the wealth of the Indies, has not life ; faith in Christ is eternal life ; for this is eternal life, to know God, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the sent of God ; the Pharisees will not come unto Christ that they may have life, for they seek the honour that cometh from man ; they trust in themselves that they are righteous. Surely thou knowest, thou rich and amiable young ruler, that Jesus is he whom God the Father hath sealed by mighty signs and heavenly attestations ; wilt thou not come unto him that thou mayest have life ? A kind providence has guarded thy life from many hurtful lusts ; thou hast resisted the temptations offered by thy great wealth, to live a life of wanton prodigality and self-indulgence ; thou hast a certain religiousness of sentiment that

leads thee to show all respect to the devout and those whose lives adorn religion. Shielded as thy life has been from the contaminations of gross sin, admired as thou art for thy attractive traits of character, it is a wonder that thou art not more lifted up with the idea of thy own moral superiority. But with all these singular advantages, there is this about thee that thou art conscious of a void within, of an undefined want. Thy wealth does not satisfy thee; thy morality does not make thee happy; something seems still to be wanting; thou art not yet sure of eternal life. Something in thy heart says, Get this matter settled, cost what it may; if necessary, build a synagogue, a hospital, give largely to the poor, and make sure that a place remains for thee at the everlasting banquet of the just; then shalt thou find in thy wealth and rank, and goodness and amiableness, the enjoyment that they should yield thee. Happily, thou art here presented with an admirable opportunity of settling this matter irrevocably. Here is Jesus, clothed with wisdom and power from high heaven: he will tell thee unerringly what good thing remains for thee yet to do that thou mayest inherit eternal life.

One thing thou lackest. Yes, that is just what I feel, and therefore am I come to thee, casting myself at thy feet, that I may learn what this remaining need may be. Tell me what it is, and I shall hasten to banish for ever the one phantom that troubles my peace. 'There was a merchantman seeking goodly pearls and accumulating them, and at last he gave all away for a diamond "richer than they all." Give all thy earthly treasure to the poor, and come, follow me; eternal life is thine in following me.'

How many there are among "the Christians" of the present age who know Christ simply as the young man proposed to know him, as an adviser, as one to get good counsel from now and then, as one to supplement the goodness and almost-sufficiency of their life, with occasional hints and a friendly blessing; and who would be as shocked and startled as he was by the declaration that Christ will avail them nothing except they forsake all to follow him. They have very much that they trust in, to make life bearable and pleasurable and satisfactory; position, substance, praise, comforts, power, worldly schemes; all, however, not quite satisfying; still there remains a void unfilled in their heart; what can it be? Oh, religion; yes, religion is what we need; this, added to what we have, will make us complete. So they go to church, listen to the music, partake of the sacrament, receive absolution, read occasionally the Sermon on the Mount, pity the poor people who formerly fancied the precepts were to be taken literally, and all is well. If Christ were on the earth, they would go away sorrowful. Now they find some to accommodate the Gospel to their liking.

Without faith it is impossible to please God. No faith, no Christ. Choose now between thy wealth and Christ; let us see where thy faith is; on what thou chiefly reliest; which scale preponderates. Jesus loved him; threw his own incomparable love into the scale; marvellous to relate, it kicks the beam. The young man was grieved at that saying. What, give all to the poor? Become as one of these poor fishermen? Drop out of the position in which a kind providence has placed me? become a mere nobody in the

eyes of men? I had not the remotest idea of such a thing when I came to this Teacher. This is altogether too much to ask.

So the young man turns his back on him in whom was all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, who had come down from heaven to give life unto the world, and who could say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." To them who believe he is precious, even all preciousness; in him is blessing a hundred-fold exceeding what they renounce, after the largest deduction for persecutions; and in him is the assurance of glory, honour, and immortality. But to him that believeth not, the good things of this life are more to be relied upon, more to be trusted in. Lord, evermore give us faith in thee, and withhold or resume whatever else thou wilt.

'Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'—MATT. XIX. 28.

"GIVE up all, and come, follow me," Christ had said to the rich young man who recognised him as a teacher come from God to show the way of life, but had no mind for a way that began with entire abnegation. To follow Christ was to leave all, to lose all. But the matter cannot be fully understood by simply looking at that which is left; we must know also that which we acquire. To follow Christ is to lose wealth, honour, comfort, manifold worldly

good, the liberty of caring for one's-self; but "what shall we have therefor?" asks Peter, and the question is not forbidden. We are to count the cost; we may also count the gain; we are permitted to have respect unto the recompense of the reward.

It all resolves itself into this, that the disciple of Christ has Christ, and whatever is Christ's. Has Christ the favour of the Father? The believer has that very favour, even the boundless love of God. Is the Spirit given him without measure? He is given unstintedly to the believer. Has he the peace of God? We too may have it. Has he the contradiction of sinners? We have the same. Has he a cross? We have it. We are despised and rejected with him. Is there a resurrection for him? There is a new life for us. Are the promises all his? They are ours. If we suffer with him we shall reign with him. If we partake in his humiliation we shall share his exaltation. "I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I have given them thy word."

'Ye who have followed me in my humiliation, confessing my name among those who despise it, and whose wrath is decreed against all that honour it; ye who have thought yourselves singularly happy in the grace that has come to you through my words, even though you had to part with all that you formerly valued; ye who have consecrated yourselves to the advancement of my kingdom in the world, at a time and under circumstances that left the glory of that kingdom a pure matter of faith, know that my dignity shall be your dignity, my triumphs yours, my unconceived glory yours. The power in heaven and in earth that

becomes mine shall become yours; as the virtue of the vine passes through the branches on its way to fruit and beauty and gladness, so my heavenly power shall flow through your instrumentality into the world. I have many things to say unto you besides those I have said unto you; the Holy Spirit shall bring to your remembrance these, shall communicate those, and the Church of all time shall receive its most precious instruction from the Head of the Church through the medium of the apostolic Epistles.'

Israel is a name that belongs to the chosen people of God, the holy nation, the royal priesthood, the peculiar people. In Israel according to the flesh there was a small minority of true believers, a large majority of those who were unregenerate, dead in trespasses and sins. The discourses of our Lord in John's Gospel show us what the great bulk of the Jewish people were. The true Israel are they who look to the Messiah. They all who look with unfeigned faith to the Messiah sit at the feet of the holy apostles whom he commissioned to declare his will; and for eighteen centuries or more wherever the Gospels have been received there also have the Epistles been received, and equally with the former have these been the means of communicating blessings to believers.

Under the old dispensation the judge was the legate of God, declaring to men the counsel of God. The sword of God was in his hand slaying all that was opposed to it; that sword being the truth. Error came to the tribunal to be exposed and to be slain. Unrighteousness came and found itself driven upon the bosses of the Divine buckler. So was it, while the Divine theory was faithfully embodied

in practice. To the judge all must needs be subject, because he represented the mind of God.

"In the regeneration:" literally in the new creation. He that is in Christ is a new creature; this is the beginning of the new creation; its consummation is in the future. When Christ shall appear in glory, then shall his servants appear with him. Their destinies are one with his. When he inherits all things, all things become theirs. When he is seen upon the throne of glory, then shall they also appear upon thrones of glory. "Inherit," he will say to them, "the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;" they shall enter into the joy of the Lord and into his glory. They shall have a body like unto his glorious body, and they shall be pure even as he is pure. In each of them (wonderful to relate) he himself will appear; "he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believed." "I am glorified in them;" "and the glory which thou gavest me I have given them."

What shall we have? Having Christ, thou hast the destiny of Christ. Does this suffice thee? Dost thou also want immunity from suffering, the flattering regard of distinguished Christians, things made easy to thee, power, place, wealth? Wouldst thou, in agreeing to follow Christ, stipulate that he shall pursue a path that pleaseth and suiteth thee? To follow him is to acquiesce heartily in all that he proposes, and to know no good but that which his will enshrines.

'Verily I say unto you, That he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.'—Luke xii. 37.

It is very remarkable how our Lord was able to give instruction to the Church of the far future in words addressed to the little company of disciples who attended on his ministry. It is wonderful how appropriately they acted the part of our representatives, as though they were delegates from all future generations of Christians to receive and convey the words of Jesus. Yet they had no thought of this at the time. They heard for themselves, and were simply intent on getting their own hearts filled and their own lives influenced by the doctrines. And in fact it was in this way that the words addressed to them became fruitful in blessing to the Church of after times. Those words would have profited us little if they had not entered into and controlled the lives of the apostles. God's truth requires a highway of faith; its pathway is through the hearts and lives of believers.

Here we find Jesus speaking in the most natural tone imaginable of the coming of the Son of man. He is there in the midst of them, and yet talks of his coming to them as something future, and something to be constantly looked for. Is he only half come? Do we look for another? Is not he himself the Son of man, the long-expected Messiah? Well, in one sense he is only half come. You know the prophecies of the Old Testament and the terms in which they depict the kingdom of the Messiah. You remember

how they describe the Messianic reign as incomparably glorious and universally triumphant; how all nature is represented as becoming jubilant in the day of that glorious dominion. You follow Jesus of Nazareth from town to town, from village to village, not in state and pomp and external glory, but with great quietness and unobtrusiveness. He performs miracles, it is true, but they are miracles of quiet beneficence, works of mercy in behalf of lepers and paralytics and demoniacs, for the most part men of the poorer classes. And after he has left a town or a district, things go on very much as they have always done; his words dwell in the hearts of a few, but the majority have turned to their old occupations and habits as though no ripple of influence had stirred their hearts. And thus it seems likely to go on. That mighty and all-subduing influence which we would have looked for, where is it? Where is the Messianic sceptre that is to strike terror to the hearts of all the nations, tribes, and tongues of earth?

The Son of man is yet to come in his glory. There is to be a time when his servants shall be by themselves, and when it shall behove them to live in constant expectation of his coming, and in preparation for it. He is first to be taken from us; how, we know not; but he is to go away, as when some lord goes to a far country to find a bride, and his servants are commanded to wait for the happy advent of the bride and bridegroom, and have all things in readiness, so that it may be made manifest that even when absent he lives in the regard and deference and affection of his servants. Blessed are those servants whom the lord when he cometh, shall find watching, with loins girded and

lamps burning. They will not have been told beforehand in what day, in what watch he will come; all they know is that he is coming, and may come at any moment. Some who profess to be the servants of the Lord Christ will, in those days of prolonged expectation and deferred fruition, give melancholy proof that their devotion to the Master was merely ostensible. They would have had patience to wait for a little; their faith in his return would have held out if it had not been subjected to a severe test. What floods of time roll by and bring him not; all things continue as they were from the beginning; why should we stand in awe of a mere semblance of authority? deprive ourselves of liberty when not the slightest reason appears for it? deny ourselves of many gratifications because of this most shadowy possibility? Evidently, the intention is that we should take matters into our own hands; act as plenipotentiaries; administer the affairs of the Church according to our own ideas. The Master is withdrawn that we may have mastery, and seek our own honour and advantage.

Look on this picture and on that, and tell me which best describes the churches of the present day. From the day of Pentecost the apostles and their fellow-Christians watched with girded loins and blazing lamps for the return of Jesus in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels, in his own glory, with myriads of saints in light. And what is singular is, that the more they had fellowship with Christ, and spiritual communion with him, realising his gracious presence, and daily receiving communications of his love, the more ardently they looked for his advent in glory. On the other hand, they who had little faith and spiritual life, and who

could only conceive of Christ as far away on high, in unknown mansions of his Father's house, were little affected by the doctrine of his future advent. It is as Christ is formed in our hearts, that he is to us the hope of glory. He that has this hope in Him, purifies himself even as he is pure. But how is it with the churches of this time? Is it difficult to find communities of so-called Christians, great world-wide churches, answering to the description of the servant who said in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming, and then began to beat the men-servants and maid-servants, and to eat and drink and be drunken? What have we here but priestcraft and self-will, and pride and violence and self-indulgence? We need not go far to find examples of this. How is it with us? Are we among that blessed number who, if the Lord of glory should appear to-day, to-morrow, or ten years hence, or at any time you please, would be found doing his very will as though he had been present all the time, and acting in all respects as faithful stewards? Then, the glory of that hour shall be our glory. Then shall it be seen that there was the highest wisdom in serving such a Master, and in not using for ourselves at all the liberty left us. Who ever heard of a prince who, bringing home his bride, makes a feast for his retainers, and waits on them at table? But something like this shall be seen when Jesus comes to his own. Not that he will demit his glory; but there will be a startling revelation of the way in which he has arranged for the exaltation and felicity of his waiting ones. His waiting servants shall be as his bride in honour and glory; and his bride shall be as himself.

'Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also, if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.'—MATT. XXI. 21.

THIS corresponds with what our Lord said to his disciples the evening before his crucifixion: "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works; because I go unto my Father; and whatsoever ye shall ask in my name I will do it." In his mighty works Christ was not merely intent upon showing forth the power that dwelt in him, but also on showing his disciples the Divine power which would be theirs in him. The believer is joint-heir with him here, as well as in the world to come. They were astonished when they saw the fig-tree perish at his rebuke; far more astonishing were the words that followed. 'Have you faith? are you one with me? then this power is yours, even omnipotence, to which it is alike easy to say to a mountain or to a tree, Be thou removed. All things are possible to him that believeth. For all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.' And when about to ascend on high he says, "All power in heaven and on earth is given unto me; go ye, therefore, into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." There has been no revocation of the promises given to believers by our Lord, and we consequently are assured that the same Divine power is with believers as was of old, is as ready to be manifested at the demand of faith as it ever was.

Some in these days seek to make men believe that the Gospels were not written for a century after Christ had left the earth. These teachers do not believe in the supernatural. Will it not puzzle them to account for the fact that they who wrote the Gospels should have introduced into each of them words purporting to be of Christ, by which believers are invested with such boundless power to work miracles? Accepting their representations of things, these promises were preposterous in the mouth of Jesus, and equally preposterous in the memory and confession of disciples.

Why was the fig-tree stricken with death? Three years the Lord had come to Jerusalem seeking fruit and finding none, when he spoke the parable of the barren fig-tree. He had now come up for the fourth and last time, and it was made very evident that they would none of such a Messiah as he was. The tree was ready on which they would in a day or two suspend him in the face of heaven and earth. But this tree, leafy yet without fruit, standing here on the Mount of Olives, directly facing the guilty city, should stand as a memorial of their past and lost opportunities, and as a foreshadowing of the destruction that was coming upon them.

Thus in all the miracles of our Lord we find not only the power of God but the wisdom of God; and the faith which unites itself to the wisdom of God is the faith with which the power of God allies itself.

The apostles and other believers of their day wrought many wonderful works. Rather let us say that God wrought many wonderful works in attestation of their

mission. He that would receive this testimony from heaven must understand well the true nature of faith.

A man may suppose that he has undoubting faith, yet his faith may be resting on a deceitful basis. As many as are the children of God, true believers, they are led by the Spirit of God; not visited now and then, but habitually guided; they believe that the will of God is to be sought in the most insignificant as well as the greatest matter. They are in habitual harmony with that will. They cannot desire aught but what shall be for the glory of God. Faith leads to entire consecration; faith shows that what seemed a little while ago entire consecration was defective, and leads to a truer consecration; and faith is content that she and her consecrations should be thoroughly proved. The believer, before he will say to a mountain in the name of Jesus, Be thou removed, must have the consciousness that God had guided all his steps to that mountain, and the assurance that the removal of that mountain will be more for the glory of God than anything else that he might ask God to do.

There is no such thing as lightning faith, flashing out of non-existence, and gone. There is a continuity of faith just as essential as its boldness. Where there is faith there the soul is receptive of God, as the branch is of the vine-sap; habitually receptive. When Moses was going with his rod into Egypt to do those mighty works, God sought to kill him at the border; he was in danger of his life, whether through sickness or what we know not; because he had allowed himself to be over-persuaded by his Midianite wife, in the matter of the circumcision of his children; this breach

of faith, this defect of consecration, had to be remedied before he could take a step over the border. "If in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal this unto you," who are pressing towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Peter fancied he had faith to follow Christ to death: 'All may forsake, I will not: I will lay down my life for thy sake.' And he thought he was giving good proof of it when he drew his sword on Malchus. He had to go back and learn over again some of the earlier lessons of faith. There was something of his own wisdom, his own will, resting like a stone upon the feeble plant of faith.

But what does this promise that we are considering say unto us? Have we nothing to do with it? It is for every believer. It assures us that the almighty power of God is with him who believeth in Jesus, and that according to our faith it shall be unto us; and says to us, O ye of little faith, how long shall I be with you and suffer you? Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me? Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, and open a wide avenue in your heart for the power and wisdom and love of the Saviour into the world.

'Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.'—MATT. XXI. 31.

ELSEWHERE in the Gospels publicans and sinners are conjoined; here publicans and harlots. Classes popularly regarded as the most removed from religious influences are designated. By the sinners and harlots we understand

persons of abandoned life, living regardless of the restraints of society, of conscience, and of God; with, however, very little thought of God or knowledge of religion. The tax-gatherer is to this day, under the oppressive governments of Western Asia, held in odium. There was in the case of the Jew a special aggravation, that he was wringing tribute from God's chosen people to replenish the coffers of an idolatrous government. Jesus does not pronounce with regard to the correctness of this. They may be the wretches and reprobates you style them; but the door you close upon them I open: "I came to call sinners."

He is now addressing "the chief priests and elders of the people," the very foremost religious dignitaries of the time, the rulers of the church, those that sat in Moses' seat. They considered themselves entitled, by virtue of this opinion, to interrogate every one who stood forth as a religious teacher, and adjudicate concerning his claims. What right had any one to speak on religious topics without the sanction of the Church? And who were the Church if not the chief priests and elders of Jerusalem, to whom scribes and Pharisees and lawyers all looked reverently up? Clothed with this divine commission, as they regarded it, they came, not suddenly, but with premeditation and deliberation, publicly and with state, to Jesus. He was in the temple preaching. The crowd divided and made way for these dignitaries of the Jewish church. They challenged him for his authority. Who had commissioned him thus to take up a position in the temple, gather crowds around him, and address them on the subject of religion? Had he been certificated by anybody? In what school had he

studied? What Rabbi had given him a diploma? It was not lawful for any one that pleased to stand up there and preach to the Israel of God. If he could furnish the adequate authorisation, they would of course not object to his preaching (under certain necessary restrictions), but they must first be satisfied as to the sufficiency of this sanction. What is thine authority, and who gave it thee?

A question something like this, but breathing a very different spirit, had once been brought to Jesus by the disciples of John. His reply was simply to open the eyes of the blind, give hearing to the deaf, healing to the sick, by a word, a touch. They went back with their answer as with great gain. How shall Jesus now reply to these great men? His reply is such as they had little dreamt of. So far from descending to the platform where they wished him to stand, and by the assertion of his claims seem to acknowledge them as the arbiters of religion, he quietly exposes before all the people their utter incompetency to discharge the duties which they had taken upon themselves. 'The baptism of John, was it from heaven or of men? All Judea went out to hear him; thousands from Jerusalem were baptized of him in Jordan confessing their sins; whence was his authority? who commissioned him? We all know that he did not receive his authority from you; did he then come without any authority? in mere self-will, ambition, or delusion? was he an impostor? and were all they who listened to him, and were convinced by him of sin and baptized by him, dupes of an impostor? or was he really, as he affirmed and as so many myriads found reason to believe, a prophet of the most High God? Answer me

this question; then shall the way be clear for any reply to your question that may be needed.'

They were staggered, confounded. What answer could they make? That John was no prophet? Then he was an impostor, a heaven-daring liar. But against this the conscience of the entire community protested. That John was commissioned of God, and had been beheaded for his fidelity to the truth, all fully believed. By such an answer they would at once declare their unfitness for the office they pretended to exercise. On the other hand, if they conceded that John was a true prophet, they would have to account for the fact that they did not receive his testimony, and this of course they could not. For John had testified among other things that Jesus was the Messiah. They could give no answer. And they consequently stood there exposed and humiliated in the eyes of all, while Jesus pronounced a startling judgment concerning them.

No amount of profession can compensate for the lack of obedience. 'Not he that says I will, but he that does, is accepted. You speak of publicans and harlots as the lost classes; you imagine yourselves to be on a rock, elevated above all possibility of danger, and able to dispense salvation freely to those who hearken to you. Know that the sinners and publicans will go into heaven before you.'

It would seem as though nothing were more debasing and corrupting than sensuality; nothing more deadening to conscience than reckless profligacy; nothing more fatal to hopes of salvation than a setting at naught of all restraint. Yet it seems there is something that places the soul more completely beyond the reach of religious truth than even

a course of open immorality; and that is religious error. Men that are wrongly religious are far from the hope of salvation, just according to the intensity of their religious convictions. What publicans and harlots would never have thought of doing, these chief priests and elders did with enthusiasm, afterwards, namely, put to death the holy followers of Christ. The salvation of Christ is for those who have no merit, who renounce all idea of being saved by their own goodness, who ceasing to despise others recognise their own deep sinfulness. It is a fatal error to imagine that mere acquaintance with the letter of the Scriptures, with theology, mere orthodoxy, will get us a place in the kingdom of God. There is no more formidable barrier between us and salvation than a presumption that our path is the path of life; for when there is this presumption the Scriptures are so interpreted as to accord with it; and when at any time the conscience becomes a little uneasy, the remedy is to press forward more eagerly,—but always in this same path. In our own days, when the Spirit of God has been poured out, the publicans and sinners have shown themselves much more ready to yield to the power of truth, and come with a broken and contrite heart to the cross of Christ, than many elders and doctors and dignitaries in the Church have done. These remain as they were, while the former have become earnest preachers of righteousness.

'Verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.'—LUKE XIII. 35.

THUS the Lord apostrophises Jerusalem while yet at a distance. Afterwards he goes up to Jerusalem, and multitudes come forth to meet him, shouting these very words, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." Was that the fulfilment of the prophecy couched in these words, quoted from Psalm cxviii.? No. For after those hosannas had died out, Christ quietly repeated the same declaration: "Ye shall not see me until ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." If a mere literal fulfilment had been all that was wanted, that was afforded; but the prophecy demanded more than a literal fulfilment. The passage in Luke, the subject of our remarks, evidently points to something beyond what occurred at the beginning of the Passover week; for Jesus said just before, "It cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem; Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." He has distinctly in view his rejection by the people of Jerusalem, and their subsequent national desolation.

The original passage (Psalm cxviii.) is in immediate connection with another prophecy repeatedly quoted by Christ: "The stone which the builders refused is become the head of the corner." Whom with wicked hands they crucified, him God raised from the dead, and exalted to his own right hand, giving him a name above every name.

Christ came in the name of the Lord, the legate of the most High God, laden with such wealth of blessing as God

saw needed ; and the Father bore testimony from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ; hear ye him." Mighty signs and wonders, works of purest beneficence, words of grace and truth, a life of unimpeachable holiness, declared that he came in the name of the Lord. But he brought not to men the particular blessing on which they had set their hearts, and they disdained his proffered help. They were politically depressed ; they were in subjection to a Gentile power ; in the comity of nations they were far from having an exalted place. They who had plumed themselves on being the chosen people of God, favoured and distinguished above all nations, and who looked that all the tribes and families of earth should be compelled to see their glory and supremacy, and sue to them for light and power, found it inexpressibly galling to be made thus of no account, and be domineered by idolaters. Their circumstances declared with sufficient emphasis the sort of Saviour that they needed, one that should first of all give them their own proper national independence, and restore them to the unimpaired enjoyment of their privileges as God's peculiar people, with dignity and power and renown such as no other nation had ever dreamed of ; after that, spiritual blessings as many as he would. And had not their own prophetical books taught them to look for this national splendour and glory ? Surely their expectations were not like the delusive dreams of the unchosen nations. Was it likely, was it conceivable, that God would send to them at such a time a Saviour meek and lowly, pacific, long-suffering, a mere teacher of righteousness, exerting his powers not in paralysing the Roman Governor and his

minions, but in cleansing a few miserable lepers, opening the eyes of blind beggars, healing demoniacs, assuring his disciples at the same time that they should be hated of all men, and persecuted to death?

No; God's choice was not their choice. This was not the Deliverer on whose head they were ready to invoke blessings, whom they would greet with gladdest acclamations. Here was not their heart's desire. This was not the Messiah whom they had seen in the prophecies. Not on such a stone as this would they build their temple. They must put him out of the way, and wait for another, the man after their own heart, who should make all their enemies his footstool.

'Very well, I go to the Father, and ye see me no more. Ye shall not see me until God's choice has become yours. Ye wish not to see me, and ye shall not see me. Enemies will come and make this place desolate; unparalleled horrors shall meet in this devoted city; it shall be given to famine, fire, and sword; ye shall be carried captive into all nations; centuries shall become millenniums, still Jerusalem shall remain a desolation in the hands of your enemies, and you shall be dispersed over all the earth, and have in many lands a sore struggle for existence. But the Messiah whom you pant for shall never come; the Deliverer you dream of shall never arise. When you shall turn with a broken and a contrite heart to God, then shall you see that the crucified and risen Jesus is the Messiah, and that he is not thirsting for vengeance upon you, but for the opportunity of giving you imperishable blessings.'

Yet we must not overlook the glorious fact that thousands

and myriads have said from the heart, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Even in Jerusalem thousands had their spiritual sight purified by the Holy Ghost, on the day of Pentecost and afterwards, so as to see the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ. A goodly company gathered from every nation, tribe, and tongue are before the throne of God and the Lamb.

How is it with thee, reader? Hast thou yet said, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord? Hast thou learned to see in him that which thy soul requires? To value his promises? to receive his testimonies and precepts? to delight in his guidance? to find your friends among his people? to put on the armour of his soldiers? to strive for the amaranthine crown which he will give? Woe unto those who insist upon having a Christ according to their own notion. They shall find many to help them in these days; many Christ-makers are risen up saying, Lo here! and lo there! But blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord, and in him is our only blessedness.

'Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.'—Luke xviii. 29, 30.

Two of our Lord's Amens in the remarks that followed the interview with the rich young ruler we have already considered. Luke supplies us with a third.

It is one of the most established verities of the Christian

religion, that he who would follow Christ to the mansions of glory has often to part with all that is dear to him, the nearest and dearest, parents, brothers, sisters, wife, children, to say nothing of lands and loved possessions: in a word, to abandon home and all its precious ties, and go forth an exile and a stranger. As a rule it is so in every land in the early days of the Gospel; and even in lands called Christian there is often no alternative but this. And Christ is not willing to recognise those as true disciples who, when the alternative is plainly forced upon them, do not find themselves more powerfully swayed by his attraction than by the nearest and dearest home ties.

But are not these ties imposed by God himself? these sacred affinities, is he not their author? Has he not commanded us to honour father and mother? Are not brothers and sisters taught of him when they love one another? Is not marriage his own ordinance? Does he not himself witness the vow of husband and wife to love and cleave to each other? Who shall sunder those whom God has united?

These are indeed sacred obligations. But there is one higher than all these. No man may become a traitor to his country because of those ties; when a father, a brother, a child has entered into a conspiracy to overthrow the sovereign, we may not plead the strength of these domestic bonds as a reason why we should ourselves join in the conspiracy. It has often happened that a man has had to choose between betraying his country and severing the ties of kindred; and when he has chosen the latter, the good

hold him in grateful remembrance. We are first and foremost to honour God—our highest love and supreme obedience are due to Him; and it is from regard to Him that we are to honour our parents and love our families. The world is full of disorder because men have parted these obligations from each other, yielding a certain deference to the inferior, but disregarding the higher. The most beautiful and admirable features in the constitution of society have become exquisitely harmful in a thousand ways, because men have lost sight of the obligation to love God supremely.

Christ was God manifest in the flesh. In him was all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. He brought with him all the claims of God. And he demanded that all the precious and consecrated ties of family should be subordinated to the obligation to follow him. He did not come to make war upon these ties. His invitations were for all; for father, mother, brother, sister, wife, children: he summoned all to follow him into the region of his Father's favour; nor had any a right to refuse obedience. But they did; and when one of their number believed and started to go forth to Christ, they stood between him and the Saviour, threatening him with undying hatred if he dared to go forth. The sacred obligations of family they used as weapons wherewith to fight against God, and as chains to bind them all where Divine wrath should one day descend upon them. O how terrible the strife! What a fearful thing to have to encounter the scorn and hatred of those whom you have from infancy been learning to love; how cruel to make war upon their tender

and endearing affection for yourself; where in this wide world shall you find love like theirs? Is love such a worthless thing that you can cast it away? What agony in the thought that their very love to you is to be made the occasion of life-long misery to them? This following of Christ which you consider a duty, they regard as a great crime; they consider you lost in the most deplorable sense, —lost to virtue, reason, religion, God.

Such is the strife that many have to encounter in this country. Some there are over whom these ties have no power, because their natures are utterly corrupt; sensuality, covetousness, or some other vice has made them indifferent to all the bonds of kindred; they are ready to snap them asunder, not for the sake of a higher principle, but because they are without any principle; and instances are not unknown of such a one making a profession of Christianity and becoming seven-fold more the child of hell than he was before. But they who have truly heard the voice of Christ can never be reckless of the interests of their kindred, or unaffected by the distress which their confession of Christ may bring upon their misguided friends. Christ does not call them to insensibility. They are summoned by the Commander-in-chief, and must brave all inferior opposition to go to him. The soldier is bound to obey his immediate superior, his captain; but when the Leader and Commander himself appears on the scene, and bids him withdraw from the captain, his duty is plain.

There is not an obligation upon earth that is not dependent upon and connected with the command to have a supreme regard for God and for his will. Even the com-

mand, Thou shalt not steal, is only imperfectly fulfilled till men obey it with reference to God's will. A man may be so governed by the obligation that he would die rather than steal; yet shall he not once in all his life perfectly fulfil the command unless he has a right regard for Him who gave the command. For all the law and the prophets hang upon the command, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind, strength. This most important consideration is quite left out of the calculation of myriads who are pluming themselves upon their morality.

But the Amen of Christ has reference to the compensation which shall be given, in this world and in the world to come, to him who *for the sake of the kingdom of God*, goes forth to Christ, parting with all that has hitherto been dearest to him. No one, he says, shall be without it. "Manifold more;" it is in another Gospel, "a hundred-fold more." Sometimes it is the delightful privilege of the believer to welcome, at the feet of Christ, those from whom he had so painfully torn himself away. His example, his prayers, have obtained for them the same grace. Then they who once cursed, heap heartfelt blessings on his head. But in the Church of Christ he is no exile. His brethren and sisters in Christ are commanded by the Master to love him even as they love the Saviour, with a love surpassing the love of those who are merely bound by natural ties.

This promise invites us all to consecrate ourselves to Christ without any reservation. How about our various affections and inferior obligations? Are they in their

place? Have we subjected them all to the authority of Christ?

Observe here the connection between consecration and faith; thorough consecration and true faith. What God hath joined let no man sunder.

'Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.'—MATT. XXIII. 36.

A QUESTION has arisen with regard to the meaning of the word "generation," especially in Matt. xxiv. 34, "This generation shall not pass till all be fulfilled." Some would have it to mean race. But the meaning ordinarily assigned seems to be the correct one. In Matt. i. 17 the word can only mean a single descent in a genealogical line. And generally it means in the New Testament all who are living at the same time. The passage we are to consider has then the force of the words elsewhere used: There are some standing here, or some now alive, who shall not taste of death until they see these things come to pass.[1]

And what are these things? Language is hardly capable of uttering anything more awfully significant than the denunciations contained in this chapter. All is summed up in the expression: "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar." "Fill ye up then the

[1] In the expression "generation of vipers" a different word is used in the original.

measure of your fathers." The doctrine is, that they who identify themselves in character with the enemies of God and the persecutors of his people who lived in former days, shall be identified with them in the chastisement due; and that they who overpass in iniquity those who have preceded them, and fill up the measure of the long accumulating iniquity, shall be visited with the long accumulated treasures of Divine wrath, hitherto kept back by the long-suffering of God and the space given for repentance. And we may further learn that in the counsels of God iniquity is estimated by the amount of light bestowed and the measure of grace resisted. They who consider not that the goodness and long-suffering of God is designed to lead them to repentance, and who harden themselves in impenitency, are obnoxious to the treasures of Divine wrath long accumulated, long suspended. The seed of the serpent, the generation of vipers, may be traced from the immediate vicinage of Paradise to the days of Jesus of Nazareth; and where do we find it? Among those who dwell in the darkness of heathenism? We trace it especially among the favoured race who had an express revelation from God. The more signally the grace of God and the unction of Divine knowledge rested upon the prophets whom God commissioned to make known his will to men, the more portentous was the crime of those who slew these wise and holy men. The more full and explicit became the prophetic testimony concerning the Son of God who was to be manifested in due time to destroy the works of the devil, the more criminal was the conduct of those who despised and rejected the inspired men who announced the coming kingdom. At

length One appeared who was incomparably fairer than the children of men; in whom was all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners; who filled up what was behind of the revelation of God made before, and gave a perfect description of the way of life, in his words and in his conduct; who employed the infinite power that he possessed in works of mercy and kindness; who endured the contradiction of sinners; One the latchet of whose shoes the greatest of the prophets was not worthy to stoop down and unloose. Eye had not seen, ear heard, nor heart conceived of such a revelation of the Divine perfections as was made in him. Well, what was his reception? Men would not have him upon the same earth with themselves; 'away with him, away with him,' was their cry; 'not this man but Barabbas; crucify him rather than Barabbas the murderer, and release unto us Barabbas the murderer rather than this Jesus.' They did not begin to breathe freely until they saw him actually give up the ghost on the cross, between two thieves. Have they not now filled up the measure of their iniquity? Can anything more be added in the way of wickedness? What need is there for the Divine judgment to linger any longer?

No, the cup is not quite full. Christ intimates that there is a manifestation of wickedness exceeding this. It is well for us to observe carefully what it is that constitutes the crowning wickedness of man. You remember his prayer for his murderers, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' They had admirable opportunities of knowing him, yet it was possible for them to be made still

better acquainted with his character, his office, his claims upon them. He was to rise from the dead; complete the education of his disciples; ascend to heaven, and pour upon them his Spirit, enduing them with power. 'Behold,' he says, 'I send unto you prophets and wise men and scribes; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify, scourge and persecute, that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth.' It was one thing to stumble over the stone laid upon the ground; another thing to have it fall upon them from heaven. Sinners like themselves, chosen, redeemed, sanctified, and sent to them in the fulness of the Spirit, with mighty signs and wonders, to preach salvation through the blood of the Lamb, this gave them the opportunity of surpassing their wickedness in crucifying Christ; and with this surpassing iniquity they filled high the measure, till the time came for judgment to fall upon their devoted city, land, and nation. The New Testament tells us nothing about the execution of these prophecies which occupy so large a place in the Gospels; and this fact would be a strange and an unaccountable one if the books of the New Testament were mostly, as some imagine, written after the destruction of Jerusalem. But other historians have furnished us with the details of that unparalleled judgment, and we find the predictions of Christ fully verified in the recorded facts.

Then men took a new start. Churches were gathered here and there all over the known world, and were built up in their most holy faith by apostolic men. And then after a little we find iniquity developing itself in the Church of Christ, and doing its utmost to get possession of that Church

for the god of this world. And the book of prophecy which closes the canon of Scripture directs attention to a generation in the last days who should fill up the measure of the iniquity of this dispensation, and upon whom should come all the righteous blood spilt since the destruction of Jerusalem. In that which is called Babylon the Great shall be found, we are told, the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all that were slain on the earth. "For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. . . . Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets, for God hath avenged you on her." (Rev. xviii. 5, 20.)

'Verily, verily I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.'—JOHN XII. 24.

SCEPTICISM is childish when it remarks that the seed or grain does not die; as a seed it does die, and is no more; and without such dissolution the germ contained in it could not come into play. It is buried out of sight; destruction lays hold upon it; then that which is indestructible finds a sphere for its energies, and the new plant begins to be.

Some Greeks had expressed to one of the disciples a desire to see Jesus. These are not thought to have been Hellenic Jews, but Greeks proper, who, like Cornelius, had received a certain measure of light, and had come up to worship at Jerusalem, though they had not access to the temple, and had not the opportunity that others had of seeing Jesus. They asked for a private interview. The

ministry of Jesus was restricted to the Jews. So long as the middle-wall of partition stood, he religiously observed it. Call to mind the affair of the Syro-Phœnician woman; also his instructions to the disciples to go only to the house of Israel. But he looked forward with glad anticipation and irresistible desire to the hour when the barrier should be removed, though he knew well that the cross stood between him and that longed-for liberty. "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished!" He was straitened—cabined, cribbed, confined—until he could command the Gospel to be preached to every creature. He replies to Philip in a way that intimates that the Greeks must still wait a little. If he had entered into converse with the Greeks, it would have given plausibility to the opinion already expressed by many of the Jews, that he was lax in his attachment to Judaism, and had a leaning towards the Gentiles. Some had already asked the reproachful question, Will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles (Greeks)?

But the heart of Jesus leaps within him when this desire of the Greeks to see him is conveyed to him. He hails it as a providential intimation that the long-expected hour is at hand. In those simple words he seems to hear the Divine promises of Isaiah xlix.: "It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth."

Christ had been announced in prophecy as the Desire of all nations. Very remarkably, the Jews, notwithstanding

the mighty attraction of cohesion constituting them one, notwithstanding their affection for Palestine, had during the last centuries of their national existence become widely scattered over the whole Roman world, and had adopted the languages of those among whom they dwelt. Through these colonists the Gentile world had become very extensively acquainted with the Jewish expectation of a Saviour, and the predictions regarding him had been even incorporated into the Sibylline writings. The time had now come of which Haggai had spoken; and these Greeks might be regarded as the delegates of the Nations, conveying their desire.

'The hour is come,' says Jesus, 'that the Son of man should be glorified. But the path to the glory which I seek is that which lies through Gethsemane, the Prætorium, Calvary. I must drink the dregs of humiliation; I must myself be lost, in a sense, lost with reference to what this world calls life and honour, and power and religion, and God, that I may be glorified with the glory that belongs to me, the glory that I seek, the true glory of God in the salvation of men. In much fruit is my Father glorified, when that fruit is manifestly from him, and not traceable to anything in man.'

The path to the cross was a path where solicitations stood on the right hand and on the left, all the way along, urging the Lord of glory to turn from the ignominy and the loss and the sorrow, and the solitude and the darkness and the profitlessness, and to confound his enemies by a revelation of his glory. And these solicitations were greatly strengthened by the affinities and affections established

between him and his disciples; and by a multitude of influences to which his human heart was keenly sensitive. But he was more than the greatest of prophets; he was God's only-begotten Son; he was the Saviour of the world; and he went to the very end of the path of self-crucifixion.

And we must be crucified with him. This is discipleship. 'Choose ye this day whom ye will serve,' he says to his disciples as he is about to throw himself into the *via dolorosa* of Calvary. 'If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am there shall my servant be.' This law of the seed-corn that perisheth applies to our sinful natures as truly as to Christ's sinless nature. But where shall our humanity find the strength and courage to give up self to the cross? In Christ. By faith. It is on Christ's cross that we are crucified. It is the Divine love that reaches our heart through Christ's tears and blood, that nerves us to deny ourselves and lose our life for his sake, and be with him in his resurrection power and glory. Poverty of faith makes imperfect consecration; the faith that overcomes is the faith that leads to entire consecration, entire crucifixion.

Have you a will that is not Christ's will? Habits that the Spirit disallows? Aims that are not warranted by the Gospel? Desires that open a door to the tempter? Or, to come still more home to you, is there anything in you that you shrink from narrowly scrutinising? Any unvisited chamber of your heart? Are you unwilling to inquire earnestly whether there may not be tasks for you of which you have not dreamed? Have you gone to work to make your life easy, letting in just so much light of truth as you can conveniently dispose of, and encouraging yourself by

the thought that the Christians around you must know, and that your way is theirs? Ah, how vain for me to lift up my voice, when a thousand around you give such a different exposition of the summons of Christ! At least let me see to it that I deceive you not by my example; let me follow Jesus in that path that leads to crucifixion before it leads to glory.

'Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury.'—MARK XII. 43.

THE reason for taking this view is added: "For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living." From Luke's report we learn that the sum she cast in was two mites (less than a penny), and that she cast it in "unto the offerings of God." As an expression of piety, of love to God, her offering outweighed all the gifts which rich men had been casting into the treasury, there in the presence of Jesus.

There seems to be a connection between these words of Christ and the remark made shortly after by the disciples: "Master, see what manner of stones and buildings!" They spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts. Something like this was perhaps in their mind: 'Without the offerings of the rich how could the cost of all this magnificence be met? Year after year, from the days of Herod the Great, enormous sums have been lavished upon the embellishment of the temple; the humble offerings

of the poor are of course not to be despised; they are acceptable to God inasmuch as they testify to the sincerity of their piety, their spirit of self-sacrifice; but unless the rich had given largely to the treasury of the Lord, how could this goodly and imposing pile have ever been reared? It will not do, will it, to discourage the rich?'

Our Lord says in reply that the sight of this splendid edifice suggests very different reflections to him from those that commonly present themselves to the minds of spectators. The Jews gazed upon it with unbounded admiration. For forty and six years no pains, no treasure had been spared to make it one of the architectural wonders of the world, to cause it to correspond in magnificence with the grandeur and sublimity of the worship to which it was consecrated. It stood there as a monument of the nation's piety, a sublime expression on the one part of their devotion to the one living and true God, and on the other of his choice of them to be his own peculiar people. They willingly overlooked the fact that Herod the Great, who had taken such a conspicuous part in making it what it was, was an Idumean by birth, and was a monster of cruelty and impiety. How suggestive is the fact that one who had taken such an extraordinary interest in the renovation and embellishment of this temple was the very person who sought to destroy the infant Jesus, slaughtering in his blind endeavour the innocent babes of Bethlehem! Jesus of Nazareth had little admiration to spare for the artistic beauty or grandeur of the temple. It spoke to him far more of the vanity and self-love and hypocrisy of man than of his piety. It seemed to the Jews a pile to last for ever. As a matter

of fact they carried on the work of amplifying and embellishing it till thirty-seven years after the death of Christ, till close up to the time when the armies of Titus encompassed Jerusalem. Christ looked at the goodly stones and offerings, the columns and spires, and thought of the judgment of God now of a long time lingering not, and soon to fall upon the pile, and bring it into undistinguishable ruin. No, his complacency is not in the wealth here lavished, but in the two mites given by the widow. We cannot doubt that Jesus would have looked with much more satisfaction upon the humblest and meanest of edifices built entirely with the money of those who had in pure love to God denied themselves to give, than upon this goodly temple. It was to a great extent suggestive to him of the hypocrisy and selfishness and oppression so terribly denounced by him in the speech recorded in Matt. xxiii.

The Jews gloried in this temple, not so much because God had covenanted to be found there, as because they viewed it as an expression of their piety, their munificence, their skill, their vast ideas, their power. It glorified them. They passed by Jesus as he stood there in the courts uttering the words of everlasting life, to march grandly up to the treasury and make these pompous offerings. The temple was a powerful rival to Jesus. They heard with indignation, and treasured up in resentment, his words, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it again; in this place is one greater than the temple; no man cometh unto the Father save by me."

Is there not in this a hint for the ritualists of our day? Is not their error that of the Jews, with simply such

differences as are imposed by the fact that the New Testament is acknowledged?

Is there not here a hint for the devotees of art? They wish to give us beautiful and costly churches. Why? To honour God? Well, we can only honour God by deferring to his view of matters. His view is that the temple which best expresses the piety of his people, the power of truth over their hearts, is most pleasing to him. Take from your building-fund all that was not given from a simple desire for the glory of God, and the residue will ordinarily be very small; but the building reared with that residue is the one in which God will take most pleasure, where he will most delight to meet his people.

The two mites were her all, and she gave them. But how would she get food on the morrow? Surely she must have some secret store, some mysterious cruse of oil, some rich and generous friend? Yes, that is the secret. She loves God, and gives cheerfully for his service what she has, because he loves her, and has always blessed her, and she is sure he will never leave her nor forsake her. Without faith it is impossible to please God. She believes in God's loving care, confides in it for the future; is grateful for the past; deems it a privilege to give her mite. Is not this the faith that says, Give us this day our daily bread, and the gratitude that receives it from God's loving hand?

How many flatter themselves that they have given largely to the cause of God who have never really had to stint themselves because of their giving? What was given was something outside of their pressing wants, outside perhaps of their comforts, away possibly in the outer circle of

their luxuries, if not even beyond that. Christians are bought with a price; they and all that they have; all that is theirs is Christ's, by the terms of discipleship. Do we abide by these terms? Do we cheerfully give all that Christ calls for, the moment he calls for it, even if it be the last two mites?

'Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.'
—Matt. xxiv. 2.

This is not by any means our Lord's only reference to the destruction of Jerusalem. On a certain occasion mention was made in Christ's presence of some Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices; Christ took the opportunity to say to his audience, Ye shall likewise perish unless ye repent; and he went on to speak of the falling of a tower in Siloam by which eighteen persons lost their lives; these and the slaughtered Galileans were not to be considered sinners above all in Jerusalem and in Galilee because they had thus suffered death in the very precincts of the temple; except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish. The pregnant word here is *likewise;* not merely perish, but likewise perish. Here is an unobtrusive but sufficiently distinct prophecy of the destruction that was to come upon the Jewish people gathered together in Jerusalem. These Galileans had come up to one of the great feasts; they met with their death by the Roman sword, in the very temple where, if anywhere, they might reckon themselves safe; and the eighteen of Jerusalem were killed by the falling of one of the temple towers. All this was just a slight fore-

shadowing of the terrible doom that should come upon the impenitent Jews. In the City of the great king, under the shadow of their glorious temple recently completed after eighty-six years of toil and art and revenue had been lavished upon it, here, surely, strong in their God and in the traditions of twenty centuries, and in the marvellous infallible prophecies of future glory, and in the bones of prophets, priests, and kings buried among them, here they might laugh to scorn the powers of the Gentiles, the armies of the aliens, the legions of an idolatrous and cursed empire. Here surely they were in a position of incomparable safety, because they were in a position of antagonism to that which God hated, and because they trusted God and looked to him alone for defence, casting to the winds that abominable political expediency which had made them so long bow their necks to the yoke of idolatrous Romans. 'Let myriads come, in the name of our God we will put them to flight. In coming against us they are rushing upon the bosses of God's buckler. We are his chosen people; we have been trampled down as our fathers were in Egypt; but we arise in the might of the Lord our God; a prophet like unto Moses will the Lord our God raise up unto us; our extremity shall only be God's opportunity; he has proved us unto the uttermost, and he will now appear in his glory, and pour confusion upon all our enemies. The seventy weeks of Daniel have gone by; the lines of prophecy stretching unto the Messiah have now spent themselves; heaven and earth may pass away, but God's word cannot pass away; now shall we arise, and the glory of our God be seen upon us, and the arrows of our King shall be sharp in the hearts of his enemies, and we

shall have sevenfold compensation for all our sorrows and humiliations.' Ah, there is some dreadful mistake at the basis of their confidence. The Roman armies compass them about, and cut them effectually off from all supplies; one or two millions of God's elect, in God's chosen city; does manna fall from heaven? No, a terrible famine rages, and multitudes of men, women, and children perish by the most cruel of all deaths; pestilences break out; day by day the enemy closes in upon them; day by day the king of terrors mows them down. The fountain of Siloam and other springs upon which the city was dependent, most strangely cease to flow; and afterwards, when the enemy has advanced and taken possession of them, they flow again; showing unequivocally that Heaven is fighting against the wretched multitude. Great numbers, maddened by thirst and hunger and terror, make their escape to the Romans; and now behold them, scourged, tortured, and crucified, five hundred at a time, on all the surrounding hills in the very face of Jerusalem. What is the meaning of this ghastly scene? Is this an echo of the words, On us and on our children be HIS blood? But soon there are terrible slaughters beneath falling walls and towers; and then the crowning scene of all in the very temple itself, when, with fire and sword, the vial of the divine wrath is fully poured out upon the infatuated people. "Now, round about the altar lay dead bodies heaped one upon another; as at the steps going up to it ran a great quantity of their blood, whither also dead bodies that were slain above (on the altar) fell down." So tells us the Jew Josephus (*Wars*, v. 9. 4; vi. 5. 6).

Yet, humanly speaking, how little probability there was,

when Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives uttering these predictions about Jerusalem, that they would be fulfilled! Why should the Romans destroy the city? now for a long time it had been theirs. But where was the nation that could take it and destroy it in the face of the Roman legions? Shall the Jews as a nation rebel, and draw down upon themselves the imperial vengeance? If they had had no ability to resist the imperial forces when they were free, how much less could they obtain it now that they were tributary! Humanly speaking, Jerusalem was now more secure against destruction than she had ever been. Yet Jesus plainly announced that their city should be razed, their temple utterly destroyed, with great tribulation such as never had been witnessed by any nation from the beginning of the world, and the carrying away of the survivors into captivity, and all within the lifetime of some then living. But as there were among the Jews many who rejected the word of God to their own destruction, so are there now many scoffers who deny that these prophecies were spoken, alleging that the Gospels were written after the destruction of Jerusalem by unscrupulous writers. These avoid one difficulty, and encounter many that are more formidable. For the prophecies of Christ are but the re-utterance of those that were written by Moses, and had existed for centuries in the Greek tongue. This 24th chapter of Matthew contains very much that cannot possibly be accounted for on the supposition of having been written deceptively; for one so writing would never have blended a description of Christ's second advent with that of the destruction of Jerusalem. But if the very Jews that saw the miracles of Christ found means of rejecting

his claims, and persevered in unbelief till the last drops of the predicted vial of wrath had been poured upon them, what wonder that the natural heart of this proud century of ours, self-glorified because of all its achievements and discoveries, should fail to discern the claims of him who died on Calvary, and now sitteth at the right hand of the Majesty on high?

'Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.'—MATT. XXIV. 34.

WE have already noticed that the word *generation* is not always in the Scriptures restricted to the meaning commonly assigned to the word. In Proverbs, for instance, we have, "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes." Here the word corresponds to a class of men. Some interpret our text as referring to the Jewish people, and prophesying their continuance until the second advent of Christ. We do not, however, object to the ordinary and obvious sense, in this passage. We incline to think that our Lord intended that his disciples should look for the fulfilment of these predictions in their own day. But what are we to understand by "all these things"?

After the intimation that not a stone of the temple should remain in its place, the disciples, sitting with the Master on the Mount of Olives, over against the city, said, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Here are three questions; one concerning the destruction of the temple, one regarding the coming of Christ, and one touching

the end of the world (*αἰὼν*, dispensation). But the questioners evidently considered these three to be virtually one. They had much to learn (from the risen Saviour and the Spirit of Pentecost) before they could accurately separate these events. Christ does not now undertake to enlighten them with regard to the non-identity of the destruction of the temple and his future advent in glory; but as these questions were blended, so his answers are blended. He speaks of the overthrow of Jerusalem and the termination of the Jewish economy, and of the coming of the Son of Man and its signs, and of the judgment of the tribes of earth by the separation of his elect; grouping all together as though they belonged together in time and not merely in moral significance; leaving it to the light of future events to furnish the means of distinguishing between the earlier and the later fulfilments. He refers to the fig-tree, whose tender branches and young leaves are a sign that summer is nigh: "so likewise when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors." We are here called to distinguish between "all these things" and "it," between the great event and the things that indicate its approach. "All these things" in verse 33, therefore, may not be applied to verses 27-31, where the coming of the Son of man is spoken of, but to the events preceding it: tribulation, persecution, temptation, false Christs, etc. And the words have of course the same meaning in verse 34. The object of the whole is, that believers may not be led away by false notions of the things coming upon the earth, of the triumphs of the Gospel, the glory of the Church; that they may not be soon wearied or faint in their minds, but endure to the

end; that they may give themselves to the spread of the Gospel through the world, knowing that the Gospel of the kingdom must be preached in all the world for a witness before "the end" can come, but that they may be sustained in all their toil and sorrow by the blessed assurance that the Son of man cometh in the clouds of heaven with great power and glory.

They that heard the words of this prophecy, some of them at least, actually saw the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple, the overthrow of all those Mosaic institutions which were bound up with the national life of the Jews. But before that day of retribution and of judgment dawned, multitudes of Christian churches in all parts of the world had been made acquainted with these prophecies of Christ, and multitudes who were outside of those churches had also heard of them. Then when those remarkable events came to pass, assurance was carried to the hearts of all who gave the slightest heed to this chapter of prophecy, that there should be the future advent of the ascended Messiah in glory and in majesty, a manifestation as unequivocal as the lightning, flashing conviction upon the hearts of all mankind, and the gathering together of the elect, the fusion of all bodies of believers in one.

The following words of Josephus will show how obvious it was to all that the ruin which fell upon the Jews was of the nature of a judgment from heaven, marked, signal, tremendous: "I cannot but think that it was because God had doomed this city to destruction, as a polluted city, and was resolved to purge his sanctuary by fire, that he cut off these its great defenders and well-wishers, while those

that a little before had worn the sacred garments, and had presided over the public worship, and had been esteemed venerable by those that dwelt on the whole habitable earth when they came into our city, were cast out naked, and seen to be the food of dogs and wild beasts." (*Wars*, iv. 5. 2.)

In these last days we have many scoffers, not merely outside the Church (there was never any lack of them there), but strange to say, in the Church, in the pulpit, in what they call the ministry of Christ and of the Gospel; men boldly scoffing at the true Christ and the true Gospel, denying the atonement, the miracles of Scripture, the physical resurrection of Christ, the possibility of a future advent. Their grand argument is, that since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning; Nature evidently knows nothing of the Supernatural. But the prophecies of Christ actually made necessary the lapse of all these centuries, for it made necessary the preliminary preaching of the Gospel unto all nations; it was necessary that time should flow on until the era of geographical discovery and of perfected communications should bring the outlying tribes of earth, Australians, South Sea Islanders, aborigines of America, and others to the knowledge of the rest; and it was necessary that in such an advanced era the spirit of Missions should awaken, and evangelists be found for all these scattered and long-unknown tribes.

'Verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods.'—MATT. XXIV. 47.

THAT is, an earthly master, having committed the charge of his household to one of his dependants in whom he has confidence, and returning at a moment when he is not expected, obtains satisfactory evidence that the steward has been faithful to his trust, and will consequently feel that he is now perfectly safe in committing to him the entire charge of his property. He was a good while absent, and the steward had ample opportunity of gratifying his selfish inclinations, indulging his passions, domineering over his servants, and, in a word, forgetting his accountability. It was the delay and the uncertainty of his lord's return that constituted the severity of the trial, and made it so thorough. And so our Lord teaches that similarly the faith and constancy and devotedness of his disciples are to be tested in the severest manner possible, namely, by the uncertainty in which they shall be placed regarding the time of his return. They shall not be encouraged, no, not even the first Christians, to entertain the idea that there is to be a long delay before the coming of Christ, that the second advent is reserved for a future generation. They are to wait for the Son of God from heaven. This is to be the attitude of the Church throughout all the phases of her history. Of course the longer the delay shall prove to be, and the greater the number of centuries into which the Christian era shall grow, the greater will be the temptation to lose sight of that promised advent, and to live without

any reference to it, and the more satisfactory will be the test in the case of those who continue in a state of preparedness unto the end. As the parable is stated in Luke xii., it was elicited in this form by a question of Peter's, who asked whether the warning given had reference to the apostles or only to others. The faithful and wise servant gives heed to this warning as addressed to himself. But the unfaithful and selfish servant gives over expecting his master, and lives as though he had a personal right to the enjoyment of the good things committed to his trust, and to the authority placed within his reach. Have we not here a prophetic intimation of that extraordinary breach of trust that was subsequently to be seen on the part of some who style themselves successors of Peter, and claim to be vicars of Christ, and heads of the universal Church? who, as lords over God's heritage, withhold the Scriptures, the direct instructions of God, from the people, and order all things with reference to their own aggrandisement, and decree from time to time new dogmas which it is perdition for any one to deny, though he may utterly neglect the inspired word of God and be held faithful: who horribly sacrifice the spiritual interests of the millions who constitute their household, and who stigmatise as apostates from the truth all who take the word of God as their guiding light, and refuse to give their consciences and their judgments to the keeping of a priest.

The faithful and wise servant is he who is always in such a state of preparedness for his Lord's coming, that the words, Lo, the Master is come and calleth for thee, will cause him not the least confusion or dismay. But how

is this perpetual consciousness of "no condemnation" obtained? Simply by the abiding consciousness of the Lord's spiritual presence; by living always under his eye; by being led of the Holy Spirit; by faith in the blood which cleanseth us from all sin. When Christ comes there shall come no more truth than there is now with us; "my word shall judge them at the last day," says Christ—that is, the word which is now with us; it is not because of the transgression of any word yet unrevealed, that men are to be condemned; the word is nigh thee, even in thy heart and in thy mouth. There are servants who do their work well enough while the master is present, but who, as soon as his back is turned, please themselves. And there are others whose highest pleasure is to do their master's will, and do it in his absence as though he were really present. We call the first sort of service eye-service. The true Christian knows nothing of this. He walks by faith, as seeing him who is invisible. He seeks daily and hourly fellowship with Christ. He in whose heart Christ is abiding by faith is the one who is truly prepared for the Lord's advent, and who shall not be ashamed at his coming.

Alas for those who profess to be looking for Christ's advent, and who are not whole-heartedly seeking the revelation of Christ in themselves. The Christ that is in the word is the Christ that is to come; the name of him whom John saw upon the white horse (Rev. xix.) was The Word of God; and as we seek him in the word, we hasten unto the day of the Lord. Any other way is simply the way of self-deception and the way of ruin. He whose intense and paramount desire it is that there may be through

him the fullest manifestation of Christ possible, to those with whom he has intercourse, he is that faithful and wise servant whom the Lord shall pronounce blessed at his coming, and advance to a position of the highest trust.

To all preachers of the Gospel whom my word of exhortation may reach, I would affectionately and solemnly say: Are you preaching the very Gospel that Christ has given, or are you accommodating it to your own ideas of things? Do you conceive that you possess a liberty of choosing among the doctrines of the Bible those for which you have affinity, and neglecting others? For instance, do you tell men what Christ tells us about the punishment of the world to come, the wrath of God, the fire unquenchable, the never-dying worm? Do you give prominence to that great and all-important truth that except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God? Do you make mention of Satan, the prince of this world, as Christ did? Do you teach that without faith in Christ's blood there is no remission of sins? Is there any part of the Gospel of which you are ashamed, and which you deny a place in your preaching? Do you seek to glorify Christ by improving him? If so, and if you go about your work with a wise understanding of what the spirit of the age requires, you shall have the praise of many, they will listen with pleasure to your flattering and comforting words, but know that the day of Christ's coming will be to you a day of confusion and dismay. His coming is not more certain than that his word shall judge men at that day, that very word which you are mangling and garnishing. Oh, see to it that that word, that very word, and only that

word is given by you to men. Beware how you extenuate aught, or set down aught. It is not *your* Christ that is wanted, but Christ's Christ.

'Verily I say unto you, I know you not.'—MATT. xxv. 12.

THIS parable of the ten virgins is in unbroken connection with the discourse contained in the previous chapter, and is in fact a part of Christ's reply to the question regarding the overthrow of the temple and the second advent. From xxiv. 42 onward the object of the address is to show the absolute necessity of watchfulness as a proof of discipleship. It is conceded that there will be very much to induce unwatchfulness; the course of things will be so very different from the anticipations of Christians that there will be a tendency on their part to relax their vigilance; they will have been so often confidently looking for the Lord of glory, and will so often have found their calculations illusory; there will be so much to make it appear that a good while must elapse before that glorious appearing, that it will be a marvel truly if faith endures the strain, and any maintain the attitude of thorough preparedness unto the end. He seeks to impress upon his disciples that they must not rely upon any external signs of the immediate coming of the Son of man to give them a timely alarm. Signs there shall be, but only they who are in the state of watchfulness shall discern them. The hour shall come as a thief in the night to those who are not children of the day, invested with the armour of light.

Immediately after the parable of the servants of the

absent lord, comes this parable of the ten virgins. Five were wise, and made preparations that lasted till the coming of the bridegroom; five were foolish, in that they prepared for a limited period only, and when this was spent were found unprepared. These correspond to the stony-ground hearers which have no root in themselves, and when the sun ariseth wither away. It is a very trifling incident that is taken to illustrate a truth of infinite moment. A bridegroom has gone to bring his bride from another place, or is coming to this place to find her; it is not certain when he may arrive, but when he does, the marriage procession must be formed at once; everything must be in a state of perfect preparation. The young women who are to take part in the festivity go to some house or garden in the outskirts of the town to wait for him. There is nothing to hinder their lying down to rest, if they first make all the necessary arrangements, and secure that there shall be nothing to be attended to when the bridegroom actually arrives. The best thing they can do is to sleep now, as there will be no time for it after the festivities commence. Watchmen are set to raise the cry the moment the bridegroom appears. The wise virgins were not unwise in sleeping; the foolish ones were foolish in doing so, because they had not made the necessary provision for delay. The one point which the incident is specially intended to illustrate is obvious. The delay in the coming of Christ will throw men off their guard, and multitudes of those who profess to be his will be found without faith when he appears. As we have already shown, those only are truly looking and waiting for him who are now vigilantly seeking to please him, and striving to mani-

fest him, and who have the accounts of their stewardship brought constantly up to date.

"Verily I know you not." 'I do not recognise in you the lineaments of my disciples. You have not learned of me. You have not been led by the Spirit. You have not had my word abiding in you. You thought you were of mine on the strength of a certain outward conformity to the ways of my people. My name, my words, my promises have been upon your lips, but the reality of love was not in your heart. You were the more easily deceived because your number was legion, and that of my genuine disciples was small. Easily and delightedly do I recognise, amidst manifold imperfections, the feeblest faith that is genuine, for this is that which endures and expands and triumphs, in its season. Not in vain does a penitent thief cry to me from the cross. But as for you, I know you not. If there were in you true faith, it would be manifested. Your heart has not been cleansed and moulded by my words. It is not my teaching that has had power over you. To whom have you been looking for guidance? Of whom have you been inquiring the way of life? Under whose direction have you been taking the steps of your Christian life? When I said, A hundred measures of wheat, you turned to another who said, Sit down, take thy bill and write four-score; when I said, A hundred measures of oil, you preferred to learn your indebtedness from one who said, Fifty will suffice. When I said, Except a man forsake all that he hath he cannot be my disciple, you thought good to turn to a preacher who said, It is not necessary to forsake all in these days; give something to show your interest in what is

good, and keep the rest; put on so much of religion as shall not prejudice your credit to any great extent with your fellow-men; the way is by no means so narrow as it once was; Christ will accept of a reasonable tribute. When I said, Come out from the world and be separate, you were not content till you had found a path-smoothing commentator (you had not far to seek) who toned this down into a very moderate requirement. My sheep know me, and the voice of a stranger will they not hear; they know me, and I know them; but as for you, I know you not. You have not on the wedding garment of preparation.'

The same distinction of the wise and the foolish that is made in this parable is made at the close of the Sermon on the Mount. The wise man's house is builded on a rock, and stands unshaken when the flood and the tempest burst upon it; that of the foolish man, built upon the sand, is swept away. The wise man heard and did the sayings of Christ; the foolish heard but did them not. To the latter Christ says "in that day," "I never knew you, depart from me, ye workers of iniquity." They who profess to be Christ's, and obey him not, are working iniquity; their influence is terribly disastrous; they calumniate the character of Christ, misrepresent the way of salvation, and obscure the light of life which shines in the Gospel.

'Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'—MATT. xxv. 40.

"IF any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ," says an inspired apostle, "let him be Anathema Maran-atha." God has sent into the world love sufficient for the salvation of the race, incarnate in Christ; they who find nothing attractive in that love, thus embodied, turn from Christ; nothing in him awakens responsive love or confidence in them; they look upon him, they hear his Gospel, and they turn away. They turn from Divine love which is eternal life, and they die in their sins. The anathema of God is against all sin; but a banquet of life has been spread, and men are invited to it; rejecting the invitation, they choose the anathema.

But let men choose their own way of expressing love, and who is there that will not profess love to Christ, when he understands that salvation depends upon it? The controversy between men and God is about whether they shall do the things pleasing to God, or those pleasing to themselves. If God will only be satisfied with a guarded profession of faith in his Son, with obedience in matters irrelevant, with an occasional melting of heart under the influence of sweet music or powerful eloquence, and let this pass for love to Christ, all will be well. But love itself cries out in indignation, 'I know nothing of such service; that only is love which prefers the will of its object; if any man study not in all things to please the Lord Jesus, I

know him not, he has my anathema. He has rejected me, and I reject him.'

The Christian then, the believer, is one who aims in all things to please Christ. He loves the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. He has a genuine devotion to this Leader and Commander. He has a zeal for his glory. His desire is that Christ may have in all things the pre-eminence ; that his kingdom may come, his power be acknowledged, his blessings welcomed, his love appropriated, his promises embraced. His heart goes where the heart of Christ goes ; his powers are consecrated to the carrying out of Christ's pleasure; he is in the world to do what Christ did when he was in the world ; to give a modern expression to Christ's affectionate thoughts. What wilt thou have me to do ? is his question ; Christ's answer is, If any man serve me, let him follow me ; I have given you an example what ye should do. Ye are my witnesses ; I am the Vine, ye are the branches ; I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit.

The believer is Christ's representative in a twofold sense : actively and passively ; as doing what Christ would have done, and as experiencing that which Christ would experience ; as an exhibitor of kindness, and as a recipient of kindness. Both these ideas are presented in the text : "Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of these little ones, ye have done it to me." The doers here represent Christ actively ; the little ones, passively. And we are not to understand here two classes of persons, but simply the believer in two different positions, or sets of circumstances. He has love to Christ who has love to Christ's people ; not merely to cer-

tain disciples that are in honour among men, that have influence, that have wealth, wisdom, or agreeable qualities; but to men, no matter how humble in attainments, how lowly in position, how weak in faith, so long as they have real faith. He has love to Christ who is drawn to every one whom Christ loves, and willingly denies himself that he may relieve the needs of such. Are they sick, poor, oppressed, in prison, friendless? Do they need sympathy, recognition, instruction, prayer? Whatever their need let me meet it so far as God gives me the means; and let me know that in meeting it I am giving Christ himself the most direct proof of my regard for him. I propose to love Him above all; shall I let him hunger, and not feed him, languish in prison, and not visit him? What a mighty stimulus have I here! what an encouragement to make light of all difficulties that stand between me and suffering believers! Can I do better than studiously endeavour, day by day, to apprehend and bring my mind under the power of this great truth, that Christ identifies himself with every one that believes on him? To realise it in its twofold bearing; first, as regards myself, that Christ is identified with me, making all my wants his care, mindful of all my losses and of the world's maltreatment of me, so that I need not occupy myself therewith; and with my brother, so that whatever I do to him is photographed in the very heart of Christ to be shown the universe on the day of judgment.

'Lovest thou me?' said Christ to Peter; 'feed my lambs, the immature believers scattered throughout the towns and villages of Galilee and Judea, whose faith has just now received a great shock through what they have heard of my

death on the cross between malefactors. I have opened thy mind to read aright the things concerning me in the Scriptures, and to know why that death was necessary; thou hast seen me risen from the grave; wilt thou keep this precious knowledge to thyself? In how many a habitation is there sorrow and perplexity because there is not thy knowledge; and thou goest a-fishing. Is this thy vocation? Because I am gone, is the opportunity of showing love to me gone? Nay, such an opportunity is given as thou never hadst before.'

How many, with Peter's knowledge, go a-fishing in our days; leave the feeble ones of Christ's flock unaided, unfed, while they with their minds full of truth turn to the world and suffer themselves to be engrossed with the pursuit of very much the same things as the world is pursuing. Oh let such ponder a little on the one energising truth that Christ is waiting for their visits, for their succour, for their love, in the bye-ways and lanes, in prisons and hospitals.

'Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.'—MATT. XXV. 45.

IN the account of what the King will say in the day that he is seen sitting on the throne with all nations before him, it may be said that we have the Gospel according to Christ. It is the Gospel that is to judge men at the last day. It is most interesting to see what it is that Christ selects for the final test of discipleship. It is love to himself shown in love to the least of his people. The absence of kindly feelings towards the least of his disciples will be found a

sufficient and perfectly safe ground of condemnation. And who are meant by the least? Those who are regarded as of least importance, by reason of their social position, their denominational connection, their lack of Christian attainments, their deficiency of intelligence. It is obvious that a number of circumstances may combine to attract us towards those who belong to the same Christian communion, or who enjoy consideration in the Church because of their abilities and their influence, and therefore the kindly acts that we may show such are an inadequate criterion. But where the circumstances are such as tend naturally to estrange us from the Christians in need, and there is only the one bare fact that they are Christians in need, to draw us to them, there we have a crucial test. It is in the presence of unfavourable circumstances, in the face of much that would chill, that the pure sentiment of love to Christ vindicates itself triumphantly.

This then is the uppermost consideration in Christ's mind; this is the way in which he is seeking to lead his people. If we ourselves are aiming at something aside from this, it is evident that we are missing the grand evidence of discipleship, and exposing ourselves to deadly peril.

Where are the denominations in this august scene? Where are gathered together the Episcopalians? Where the Presbyterians? Where the Baptists? Where the Methodists? Where the Independents? Where this, where that minor division of the Church? Ah, there is not a word here of denominationalism. There is no 'Come up hither' addressed to the Established Church; no place of honour assigned to the Dissenter, as such. All your fancied

advantages on the score of your particular communion, all that fed your self-complacency in your church habits, etc., vanishes from sight. The one inquiry is for loving services rendered to those whom Christ loves.

From the excessive regard shown by some in these days to the subject of worship, and especially to accessories of worship, to a multitude of forms which have not in them any essential element of worship, to Ritual and the Sacrament, one would suppose that they entertained the idea that this sort of thing would be the crucial test of the judgment, and that Christ would say, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, for you offered up the frequent sacrifice of my body and blood, you recognised my objective presence in the elements, you prostrated yourselves with lowly devotion before me thus present, you worshipped me with postures, and crossings, and costumes, and colours.' For there are many who evidently consider these the great things in Christianity. They fancy that they are giving a sufficient proof of love to Christ by their system of worship, and by keeping well aloof from Christians of 'the sects.' But alas! unless they can adduce very different evidence of love to Christ from this, it will go hard with them; they shall hear the awful words, 'Depart from me.'

'This is my commandment, that ye love one another. This is the great commandment of the Gospel. Hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another. Not love to the members of the communion which you have so nicely separated from the common body of Christians: but love to all that love me.'

There are some who seem to expect that they shall be recognised as Christ's in the last day, on the ground that they have charity enough to think hopefully of all the world; and that Christ will say to them, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, for you would not believe that men were in danger of being lost, and despised the charity which seeks to be helpful, preferring that which flatters itself that all is well.' Their Christ was one who could not possibly say unto any, 'Depart from me, ye cursed.' They found more benignity in themselves than in such a Christ. Well, they shall hear this word 'cursed;' and they shall pronounce it upon that very benignity of theirs which fought against the true Christ and his salvation.

It does not appear that we shall have a better opportunity of showing love to Christ in heaven than we have here. Here we can wash his feet, give him food to eat, raiment to put on, can visit him in prison or in the hospital, give him our sympathy, our time, our substance, our industry, give him with the sweat of our brow, give him with anguish of spirit. Wherever there are brethren in tribulation, there we can minister to him. If we truly know him, we shall recognise his lineaments even where there is a good deal to obscure them. If we know not the Christ of the Gospel, we shall stand aloof from the least of his brethren, and devise some comfortable or ornate way of our own to show our love. "Inasmuch as ye did it *not*." Ah! that terrible word, NOT.

'Verily, verily I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.'—JOHN XIII. 16.

THE disciples had disputed among themselves which of them should be greatest. Their imaginations had been stimulated by the scenes and circumstances connected with Christ's entry into Jerusalem, the popular acclamations and plaudits, the garments cast in the way, the palms of victory, the testimony of those who had seen Lazarus waked from the dead, the apparent readiness of the people to range themselves under the banner of Jesus. The long-expected hour when Christ would assert his authority and take unto him his true power, and sit as King in Zion, the Lord's Anointed, seemed at hand. Honours would immediately come flowing in upon them, and they would be magnificently compensated for the prolonged period of comparative humiliation and persecution. Well, whose should these honours be? Who would have the chief claim to them? Who should sit on the right and on the left hand of the Prince-Messiah? Who were to occupy the thrones subordinate to His, in His kingdom? Surely there would be a difference. Some of them had been chosen before others, and had been more intimately associated with him in the labours and trials of his ministry than others had; some had made sacrifices to become his followers; some had been singled out by him for special privileges on this and that occasion; for instance, they had been with him on the Mount of Transfiguration, and had seen his glory as of the only-begotten of the Father. Surely

then they might expect that a difference would be made in their favour, when the hour came for the distribution of the honours of the kingdom. They in some way suffered this confident expectation to become apparent; the jealousy of the other disciples was kindled; they scouted the idea that any such distinction should be made, to their prejudice; it was one thing to be subject to the Lord Jesus, but a very different thing to give way to a former fellow-fisherman, and be domineered by a fellow-disciple.

With poignant grief our Lord saw the rising of this spirit. How little had they clothed themselves with the humility which he had been constantly exhibiting; how far were they from his own meek and lowly spirit; how had they failed to see the superior beauty of the self-abnegation which was so markedly his characteristic! 'How long shall I be with you and suffer you? Have I been so long time with you, and yet have ye not known me?' But something more emphatic than words is necessary. Jesus makes himself as a servant; lays aside his garments, girds himself with a napkin, takes a basin of water, and enters upon the duties of the most menial servant. He approaches his disciples to wash their feet, and, in spite of their remonstrances, goes through with it. We are told that he did this with the full consciousness that the Father had given all things into his hand, and that he had come from and was about returning to God. Afterwards he said to them: "Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well: for so I am. If I then your Lord and Master have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you."

The argument is a very simple one. The servant is not greater than his lord; he cannot therefore refuse to perform acts that his lord performs; he cannot disdain to wait upon those whom his master does not disdain to wait upon; he cannot count that degrading which his master does not count degrading; he cannot refuse to sacrifice his own dignity, convenience, pleasure, in favour of the dignity, convenience, and pleasure of his brethren, when Christ, his Lord and Master, gives him the example of such a sacrifice. Surely, if he be a disciple at all, he will shrink back in horror from the idea of making himself greater than his Master. Alongside of this marvellous example, how utterly odious is that pride which would teach the Christian to look down disdainfully upon his brethren, and rather expect them to defer to him, than be willing to give them the preference! What is Christian discipleship? If we look to the Church, we find that it is quite consistent with the spirit that grasps at greatness and desires pre-eminence, and looks down upon believers of a lower grade, and wishes to be deferred to and waited upon and made much of. Where do you find the spirit that takes pleasure in the most menial service, if thereby a fellow-believer may be advantaged? Who are they that truly and continually imitate the example of Jesus, and ask for opportunities of service without regard to the honour which cometh from men?

But if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And it is his word that is to judge us in the last day. Surely we ought to be crying mightily to God to send into our hearts the very spirit of his Son, that we may cease from making ourselves greater than Jesus.

The disciples soon found out that there was a great deal of tribulation and humiliation between them and the honours of Christ's kingdom. When the Lord was crucified they were cast into a horrible pit of darkness and dismay. But they arose with him, and the Spirit of Pentecost armed them with faith and hope for the conflict of life. They learned Christ anew; were crucified with him, so as to put away their former hankering after temporal greatness, and were content through much tribulation to enter the kingdom of heaven.

'Verily, verily I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me.'—JOHN XIII. 20.

IN Jesus was the fulness of the Godhead bodily. He was the light of the world; the Sun of Righteousness. It was far from his purpose that that Sun should set with his departure, or that it should suffer any obscuration when he ascended to the Father. In a very important sense Christ's incarnation relates to all time; "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." The true Vine is where its branches are. "It is expedient for you that I go away," said Christ to his disciples; but how could it be expedient if anything of him should be lost to them, and to the world through them? It was expedient because, by his physical withdrawal and the outpouring of the Spirit, they should be made far better acquainted with him, and be brought into a much closer identification with him, than was the case before. And these wonderful chapters in John show

how diligently and earnestly, when about to be separated from them physically, Jesus sought to communicate and make over to them all the wealth of his own nature, his peace, his joy, his treasures of wisdom and knowledge, his place in the Father's affections, the promises addressed to him in the Scriptures. So that he could turn to the Father and say, "I am no more in the world, but these are in the world."

"He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me." They whom Christ sends are his plenipotentiaries, fully commissioned to make known his will, his grace, Himself to men, and to take possession of the hearts of men in his name, by means of his word delivered in its integrity to all believers. The emphasis is on the word *whomsoever*. Fulness of dignity and authority goes with my nomination, and does not in any degree depend upon social status, intellectual endowments, or even upon church privileges. Not merely he that receiveth you, my apostles, the companions of my ministry, distinguished by so many favours; but he that receiveth whomsoever I send. Some that are now far from the kingdom of God and the knowledge of the truth, may ere long be preaching the Gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, and their success may surpass that of some members of the apostolic college.

But a question of great moment presents itself: Who are the sent of Christ? Who are these ambassadors in receiving whom we receive Christ, we receive God? "By their fruits ye shall know them," says Christ. "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them

by their fruits." And he graciously proceeds to inform us what the fruits are by which we may identify his prophets, his ministers. "He that doeth the will of my Father in heaven." And this will is embodied in Christ's words: "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man who built his house upon a rock." We learn from this that the true minister of Christ is in the first place his true disciple, receiving all his words into a good and honest heart, and giving these words their true expression in his life. This he can only do by having the Spirit of Christ: "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." The Spirit of Christ is a spirit of self-renunciation; of love to the brethren; of true devotion to Christ and his cause. In the next place, one whom Christ designs to send to men is furnished with the gifts needful for the ministry; and these gifts are an evidence to him and to his brethren that he is called and commissioned of Christ to make known the Gospel. They who seek in the ministry a means of livelihood, an honourable profession, a position, who seek their own, who are more concerned to get than to give, these certainly are not sent by Christ. They have not his Spirit. The Good Shepherd gave his life that the flock might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly; he commits his flock to shepherds whose chief concern is the imparting of life to the flock; but there are a multitude of false prophets whose principal consideration is how they may themselves get a living, and who never for a moment put the advantage of the flock upon a level with their own.

The word "apostle" simply means "one sent;" one who

had been separated by Christ from the world unto himself, made acquainted with his will, moulded by that will, and then sent forth to declare it. The distinction of those we call apostles is, that they were companions of our Lord in the days of his flesh, and were personally commissioned by him to preach his Gospel to Jews and Gentiles, and lay the foundations of the Church of the New Jerusalem. But Christ, with all his plenitude of power, material and spiritual, goes with every one whom he sends to men with the offer of his grace; he himself with all his power on earth to forgive sin, with his power to redeem from all iniquity, with his power to destroy the works of the devil, goes with every true evangelist, every true minister, of whatever denomination.

Is there any place here for clerical domination? On the contrary, the axe is here laid at the root of all this. For what is it that I receive from the servant of Christ? Christ himself; I am brought into intimate and indissoluble relation with Christ himself, by means of the word embraced in faith; I have the same Christ, and the same access to Christ, and the same promises in Christ that the evangelist has. It is not in the power of the minister to take away what he has given, or to lay an embargo upon any portion of the evangelical blessing; Christ is not a treasure of which he has the key, and which he may dole out according to the homage he himself receives. The message committed to him is, "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely. All things pertaining to life and godliness are given us in Christ. He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life."

What greater need have we in this day than to be spoken to by men who give evidence that they know Christ, and have fellowship with the Father and the Son, and are led by the same loving, lowly, and self-denying spirit that dwelt in him; men, in a word, fitted by richest experience of his grace to be his representatives in the world, so that rightly to know them would be to know Christ? But a need not inferior to this is, that we should be so much under the guidance of the Spirit of God that, given such men, we should know them. There were false apostles in the primitive churches, and Christ commends those churches that were able to detect their true character, and to turn from them; but many heard them gladly, and lost the power to recognise Christ in his true ministers. "The world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." "He came unto his own, and his own received him not."

"Thou canst not bear them that are evil," said Christ to the church at Ephesus, "and hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars." How did they try them? The word of Christ was in their hands and in their minds; they knew the Gospel; the Sermon on the Mount; they knew Christ; the Spirit of God was with them; and in the exercise of that right of private judgment which was bestowed upon them along with the Gospel and the Spirit, they ascertained the falsity of these so-called apostles. Having already received Christ, they could easily see through the false pretensions of those whom he had not sent. These false apostles declaimed loudly no doubt against the right of private judgment.

'Verily, verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.'—JOHN XIII. 21.

ONLY he who stands in relations of amity to a person can betray him. The word is not applicable to anything an enemy can do. They in whom confidence is placed, and from whom fidelity may legitimately be expected, and to whom, in consequence of this, powers are conceded that an enemy could never enjoy, these become traitors when they avail themselves of the peculiar advantages thus enjoyed to play into the hands of the enemy. Judas, one of the twelve chosen and highly favoured friends of Christ, became a traitor, making over to the enemies of his Master those advantages which he enjoyed, and thus affording them special facilities for carrying out their designs against Christ.

But was Christ in a position to be betrayed? Was he hiding in some unknown or inaccessible fortress, that his enemies were precluded from approaching him without the treacherous mediation of a professed adherent? Some months before, he had withdrawn from public observation, in a measure; and the Pharisees had commanded, and probably offered a reward, that if any man knew where he was, he should show it, that they might take him. But now, was he not daily preaching in the temple?

The chief priests and elders feared the people. They might probably have ascertained without much difficulty where Jesus was to be found at night; but they wanted something to justify their conduct in the eyes of the people. When Judas came offering to lead their band against Jesus,

they perceived at once that this was all they needed. For Judas was one of the twelve specially favoured disciples of Christ; one who had attended upon the ministry of Christ from the beginning, seen all his miracles, listened to all his secret counsels; one who had narrowly observed the private life of Jesus, and was as well acquainted as any one could be with whatever evidence of his Messiahship Christ had been able to adduce; yet, lo and behold, this highly favoured apostle, this bosom companion, finds himself at last constrained to acknowledge that the pretensions of Jesus are baseless, that the evidences adduced are valueless, that he has no claim whatever to the confidence of men; finds himself constrained to testify in the most emphatic manner possible, that the chief priests and elders and Pharisees have been all along right in their opposition to this Galilean teacher, and that the people have been utterly misguided in their favourable feeling towards him. This was what was signified by the betrayal of Judas. It was to the rulers like a testimony from heaven that they were in the right, and Jesus an impostor. Who now could ever venture to pronounce a word of censure against them for the course they had taken in endeavouring to check the progress of this heresy, and bring about the overthrow of this false teacher? The eyes of his most intimate and trusted friends are now open, and they bitterly feel that they have been cajoled by Jesus, and led to the brink of a precipice; and though, having gone so far, they for the most part have not the moral courage to break asunder the bonds which have been woven about them, yet here is one at least who finds it impossible to lend himself any more to

the imposture, and who comes forward to confess that Jesus is a false prophet, worthy of that death which we decreed against him from the beginning. Thus, in the twinkling of an eye, we stand vindicated in the eyes of the whole community, and are free to go forward and do what we think proper to this deceiver. This was the grand significance to the Pharisees and rulers of the offer of Judas to betray him.

Some might say, In every flock there is a black sheep; this Judas is probably a bad man who has not been able to subject his life to the holy precepts of Jesus. But then would come the answer, Why did Jesus choose such a one? and why has he continued to this day to number him among his confidential disciples? If he does not know the character of his chief disciples, how can he be regarded as a prophet?

Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas would betray him. Jesus was in all points tempted like as we are, and to be our sympathising High Priest it was fitting that he should come closely and bitterly in contact with false disciples. There was needed an exhibition of what human nature was capable of, in the presence of the very highest advantages, in the presence even of God manifest in the flesh. It was expedient that they who accompanied Jesus should be in some respects representatives of the future Church. Judas was chosen not because of the evil elements of his character, but because of what was good in him. That he had convictions of the Messiahship of Christ, of the truth of his words, and of his destined supremacy, we can hardly doubt; his suicide shows that he regarded Christ as a good and true man, and therefore the Son of God. If he

had not been a man that sympathised with them to some extent, the other apostles would have felt the incongruity of his companionship; but they were not at all ready to suspect that he was the one who should betray Christ; up to the last they seem to have been prepared to testify of him that he was worthily among them. But he was not consecrated; there was a principle within him never subjected to Christ; his covetousness for a time remained latent; but he bare the bag, he had opportunities that brought temptations with them; the root of evil within him spread and spread, until it swallowed up his better convictions and resolutions. Like the others he had conceived of Christ's kingdom, from the first, as a temporal kingdom; perhaps he had perspicuity enough to see, at the last, that Christ was simply intent on reigning in the hearts of men; he had no faith for an invisible and spiritual kingdom.

But we cannot spare too much of our meditation for the Judas of that day. It is important to inquire who are the successors of this apostle in our day. Who are those that occupy high places of influence in the Church, and betray Christ into the hands of his enemies? Are there not some among us who tell the enemies of Christ that there are no prophecies referring to him in the Old Testament, and teach by inference that Christ speaks falsely when he says, "The Scriptures are they which testify of me; Moses wrote of me"? Are there not some who deny that Christ tasted death for the sins of men, and that his blood cleanseth from all sin, and that we have salvation through his death? Are there not some, professedly ministers of Christ, who deny the miracles of the Bible? Are there not some who

claim that Christ has given to their order the power of life and death, even everlasting life and death? Are there not some, called ambassadors of Christ, who teach that holiness is not a *sine qua non* in Christ's kingdom, and encourage the wicked to combine hope with wickedness? Some that mind earthly things, whose God is their belly, whose paramount consideration is given to the comforts and honours of life while they avouch Christ as their righteousness, their Leader and Commander? Yes, we have successors of the apostle Judas, and they are daily betraying Jesus into the hands of his enemies, and arming the latter with mighty arguments against the truth, all the time that they are professing to be set for the defence and confirmation of the Gospel.

Blessed are they who when they hear Christ ask, "Which of you shall betray me?" take note of the Judaic element in their own heart, and seek to be filled with the Spirit, and ever led by the Spirit, that they may come off conquerors and more than conquerors through Him that loved them.

'Verily, verily I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.'—JOHN XIII. 38.

WHAT extraordinary things are these that were falling on the ears of the disciples? 'One of you shall betray me; thou, Peter, shalt deny me thrice.' And this at the very time when they supposed themselves at the end of their trials and humiliations, and when they were expecting the immediate establishment of Messiah's kingdom of glory, and when

they were already contending among themselves as to the division of the honours and privileges of that kingdom. Strange tidings these! obscure sayings, parables, needing some interpreter.

One of the earlier evangelists tells us of some words that preceded this announcement. The Shepherd is to be smitten; the sheep shall be scattered; all ye shall be offended because of me. They all protested against the suggestion of such a possibility; Peter most strenuously of all: 'all others may, I shall never be offended, never lose faith in thee.' Then the Lord: "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." 'Satan thinks of you all as he did of Job; he says that your faith is good for nothing; all that is necessary is a sufficiently severe trial, and you will be manifest in your true characters; once thoroughly sifted, all will appear chaff, no true grain at all. He may be right in his conceptions of your nature; but he overlooks one thing—I have prayed for thee, Peter; a grain of true faith shall abide in thee, and in its time it shall spring up and bear unexpected fruit; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.' Satan continues to clamour for opportunities of testing the followers of Christ, real and ostensible. He is persuaded that the church of our own day is scarcely anything but chaff, and he is industriously organising the means of thoroughly sifting it, little thinking that the few grains which may resist his sieves will be abundantly more productive, in the hand of the great Sower, than all the chaff-like multitudes that people

our churches could ever have been. He has various sieves. These modern Christians have learned the art, he thinks, of resisting the attacks of outside infidels; let men of note within the church, men of letters, yea, let bishops even come forward to point out, with fair words and smooth speeches, with much subtlety and simulation, flaws in the Scripture; let them teach that Christianity does not require us to believe in the inspiration of the Bible, in the miracles, in the prophecies, in the sacrificial death of Christ, in his freedom from error, etc., etc.; and of a surety, myriads who would have been shocked to hear these things from professed antagonists will hasten to revise their creed. Then let those who cannot be disposed of by this sieve be tested by the sieve of the Romanisers; here again let the assault come not from without, but from within, disguisedly and with many blandishments; and see if many who would have been shocked by the naked arguments of Romanists will not listen to the smooth words of cunning men in their own church. And are these the only sieves by which the churches are now being sifted? Nay, verily, there are many more. Many are the antichrists of our day, and they all loudly proclaim themselves the genuine followers of Christ; each says, Lo, here is Christ, he has been lost for ages, and I have found him: a new Christ is found for us every day.

"I will lay down my life for thy sake," said Peter; "I am ready to go with thee, both into prison and to death." Ah, it often seems so to the professed friends of Christ when they are gathered around the table to commemorate his dying love; but when they find themselves shortly after in the presence of Pharisees and rulers, of men of the world,

scoffers, and religious infidels, their pace slackens, they follow Christ afar off, they keep at a safe distance, and, if need be, will deny the Lord in various ways.

Was it necessary that the apostles and evangelists should incorporate the story of their shameful desertion and denial of Christ in the very Gospels which were to constitute the Church's charter of salvation? How natural would it have been for them to say, 'It is not expedient that these things should be made so very public; it was a momentary fall; is it not of the greatest importance that the Church should have our characters in reverence and esteem?' These considerations would have influenced them, if the Spirit of truth had not taken up his abode in them, and taught them what to say and what to write.

Christ knew all; yet what wonderful words of love fall from his lips all this evening! The hours that remain before Judas shall come, and the others take to flight, hardly suffice for him to bring forth all the marvellous treasures of his grace, and invest them with the riches of his kingdom. They wanted the kingdom and its spoils, and little thought that in these parting words of Jesus were embosomed the honours, dignities, powers, and possessions of his everlasting kingdom, to be appropriated when faith should be mature. Not as the world giveth, gave He. And all this he did, knowing perfectly the sad and shameful developments of their nature to which they were hastening. But he also knew what was beyond. He did not keep his eye fixed on the pit in which they were to plunge; but on the better bank beyond, where they should soon stand, gathering to their hearts the previously neglected wealth of his words.

'Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.'—MATT. XXVI. 13.

THIS gospel: what gospel? there was no mention made of any gospel. Our Lord speaks as though his life were a gospel: for him to live and move, to see and be heard of men, was to give them glad tidings, even Heaven's announcement of peace on earth, good-will towards men. And this is true. What we call the Gospel is just the photograph of Christ taken by the evangelists: no, not the photograph, not a picture; a picture would show him simply as he was at one particular moment, would show him quiescent, speechless; the representation of the Gospel shows him in hundreds of circumstances and relations, shows him acting and suffering, and reproduces the gracious words that fell from his lips. It is not a picture of Christ, it is Christ himself, radiating hope, light, and glory into the heart of the believer. This gospel is this Christ.

But observe: mention of his burial introduces the mention of this gospel. The life of Christ, without his death, would not be a gospel. There would be no glad tidings in a life of simple holiness. What man needs to deliver him from his prison-house is not to know the perfect will of God. The two commandments on which hang all the law and the prophets had been given from the beginning. By the law is the knowledge of sin. By the holy life of Christ is that knowledge intensified. As no man

can come to the Father save through Christ, so no man can come to Christ save through his death. This is the truth which was taught in the discourse contained in John vi.: "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." There are some who preach a gospel to which the death of Christ is not essential; they fancy that man is ready to turn to God if he could only be sure of forgiveness, ready to turn from sin if he could only be sure of help,—a notion that the Bible everywhere condemns; and they fancy that God is indifferent to all past violations of his law, if the sinner will consent to receive his forgiveness and his love,—a notion that is equally in conflict with all the teachings of God's word. "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission" of sins. Man is "dead in trespasses and sins."

Jesus speaks of his burial. He knew that he was to be crucified with malefactors within three days, and buried under circumstances which would not allow of the anointing of his body by his disciples. He knew that he was going down into the grave; that his disciples would be scattered, and become as trembling sheep deprived of a shepherd in the midst of ravening wolves; and yet he calmly speaks of "this gospel" as to be preached in all the world. He was perfectly conscious that his words and acts, and all that happened to him and through him, would be related in all the languages of men, and that from age to age there would be multitudes of disciples running the gauntlet of all forms of persecution in order to tell men of the way of salvation through his blood. What an almost infinite unlikelihood there was of the fulfilment of such a prophecy!

If one or two of the disciples had been appointed amanuenses, and had accompanied him with style and tablets in hand, taking down his words as they were spoken, and recording his miracles as they were wrought, the prophecy would not have been so startling. Often he spoke to those who had no ears to hear, and saw his words dissipated in air. But he knew that after his death would be the Spirit, bringing to the remembrance of the disciples what they had heard, and making the truth wondrously effectual in their hearts.

How very differently the act of Mary impressed Jesus and his disciples! They found fault with it, and believed that in doing so they were simply applying principles which Christ had taught them. Jesus certainly had taught them to avoid everything like wastefulness, to consider the poor, and forego matters of mere self-indulgence. When did he ever give the slightest intimation of a desire to receive costly attentions like this? They felt that they knew the Lord's mind thoroughly with regard to this matter, and so they hesitated not to reprove Mary for throwing away several hundred denarii upon the ointment. And if the question had come up before the money had been expended, there is little reason to doubt that Jesus would have disfavoured the expenditure. Observe, however, that it is Judas who takes the lead in censuring the sister of Lazarus: he coveted the money for his own uses.

Money is not the only thing too precious to be wasted. Since Jesus had raised her brother from the dead, two months ago, she had been treasuring and economising in expectation of a day when she should have an opportunity

of showing impressively her affection and gratitude. Every mite of the sum laid out on this box of ointment represented love, reverence, devotion—feelings too holy in the sight of Jesus to be slighted. If she had met with censure from him instead of approbation, she would have been inexpressibly humiliated and disappointed. It was very far indeed from the thought of Jesus to allow her to go away cast down and ashamed. He will not reject the tribute of her love. He accepts it, and guards against all possible evil inferences by giving it a special significance. 'It is against my burial,' he says. 'You will not have the opportunity of showing regard in this form after my death, and I accept it now by anticipation.' And that all may know that love to Christ is that which is of highest value in the estimation of Heaven, it is decreed that the same gospel which proclaims to all mankind the love of God in Christ shall tell the appreciation in which he holds the love of man responsive. God gave the word, and great is the company of those who at this day are publishing throughout the world the account of that interesting transaction in the house of Simon, at Bethany, three days before the Lord of glory was so wickedly done to death.

'Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.'—Mark xiv. 25.

The disciples ate and drank with our Lord after his resurrection, as we learn incidentally from Acts x. 41. Some suppose that the reference in the text is simply to the inter-

course that he had with his disciples after his resurrection and before the ascension, considering the kingdom of God to have been then fairly initiated. Matthew thus reports the words: "Until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." And it is true that the Church of Christ is often called the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, though these expressions are by no means reserved exclusively for that reign of Christ in the hearts of his people which we now witness; they are often used for that reign of God and of his Christ over the redeemed world, which the whole creation is said to be waiting for with groaning and travail. Taken simply by itself, the expression "the kingdom of God" does not determine whether the reference is to the day of the Gospel or the day of glorious fruition. Perhaps the point of time from which the new dispensation may properly be dated is the day of Pentecost. Nor are we told that Jesus took of the fruit of the vine with his disciples after his resurrection. They drank with him, but whether water or wine we know not. How also should we understand the word "new" in such an application?

But may we not understand the words in a spiritual sense? It was the meat of Christ to do the will of his Father, and to finish his work. This he said after the conversation with the woman of Samaria, when his disciples returned from the town, bringing him food: "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." Stronger than his physical appetite for food was his spiritual appetite for the salvation of souls. Where others looked for harvests of mere grain, his grand concern was for the evidence of a coming spiritual harvest. And prophecy speaks of the blessings of the Gospel under the

metaphor of a banquet : ' Ho ! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and price.' This is the wine that Christ gives to the sinner ; but the prayer of faith is as the best of wine to the lips of Christ. ' If any man hear my voice and open unto me, I will come in and sup with him, and he with me.' And let us remember that on this same last evening of Jesus with his disciples before his betrayal, he gave them the parable of the Vine and the branches ; and had much to say of the fruit of the vine that was to appear after the Holy Spirit should come upon them. And in Isaiah v. : " For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel ; and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression ; for grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes." On the day of Pentecost and subsequently, when thousands were added to the Church, and all were filled with love and joy, and no man counted anything his own, and all were striving who should best praise and glorify Christ, then the much fruit of the true Vine appeared, and this fruit was new, unlike anything the world had seen before, and there was joy in the presence of the angels of God. Then Christ's joy began to be fulfilled in his people, according to his prayer. Then too the apostles, emancipated from their former darkness and grossness of apprehension, found their meat in doing the will of God, and the flocking of awakened souls to the banquet of the Gospel was to them incomparably sweeter than any wine had ever been, and their spirits were elevated as no mere fruit of the vine could ever have elevated them. Men that saw them in their exaltation and rapturous joy and holy boldness on the day of Pentecost, knowing not

what else to say, exclaimed, These men are full of new wine. The apostle Paul, writing to the Ephesians, says, "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be ye filled with the Spirit." That momentary elevation of mind that men seek in inebriety is but a counterfeit and base simulation of that true elevation of the soul which is experienced when God's love is shed abroad in the heart by the Spirit. This was the holy and blissful elevation experienced by the apostles when they saw the work of God prospering in their hands, and multitudes brought to the feet of Jesus. Surely this conception of the new wine agrees far better with all that fell from the lips of Jesus on that sacred evening,—all that then occupied his mind.

Matthew has it: "I will drink no more of *this* fruit of the vine." It was a cup of wine that Jesus had in his hands and was giving to his disciples, that they might drink it as the new testament in his blood. Of that cup we shall drink, showing forth the Lord's death till he come. And perhaps there is something in the expression which directs our minds to a day that is beyond the period in which the Church is celebrating the Lord's Supper. We know that Jesus shall make all things new. "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth. There shall be a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. Behold, I make all things new. The works of the devil shall be destroyed. Sin and all its works and tokens shall be utterly purged away. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." Christ shall have carried to successful and absolute completion the work of redemption, and shall vacate the offices which had reference to the progress of that work, and God shall be all in all (1 Cor. xv.

27, 28). Then shall be joy such as till then no heart is able to imagine. Then shall they from the east and the west, the north and the south, who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God, with the apostles, prophets, and martyrs, with Christ himself, in his Father's kingdom, and the new wine of which they shall drink will have been gathered from the paradise of God.

'Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father.'—John xiv. 12.

Show us the Father, had Philip said. The reply of Jesus was, 'Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me. Have this faith; see in me the revelation of God; behold his works in all that I have done; recognise that the words I have spoken are his words; what I have been to you, that God is to you; my love is his love; let this be your faith in me, embracing not merely what a Jesus of Nazareth might bring to you, but embracing the fulness of the Godhead that is in me. Have this faith, and take it to the cross and to the tomb, and greet me with it when I rise from the dead; then shall you do the works that I have done. He that believeth on me' (the force of the Greek preposition is rather *unto;* it conveys the idea of motion; faith in Christ is something that carries us unto Christ),—'he whose faith is thus unto me shall do the works that I do,

and greater.' Faith appropriates; it makes its own that which it grapples; he that has faith in Christ has Christ, has God in Christ; according to his faith is Christ with him and in him. The vine brings forth fruit in its branches; the glory of the branches is the glory of the vine. Christ had no thought of carrying back to heaven the riches that he had brought into the world with him; he did not die that the Divine power and grace and sufficiency with which his life was freighted might be lost to the world; Calvary was no disastrous shipwreck; the grand idea was that the Divine fulness in him should through his death be only the more surely engrafted upon humanity. If there were a tree in nature, solitary of its kind, which died in an effort that scattered its seed far and wide over the earth, such a tree would serve us as a figure; when no more in the world, many other trees, its offspring, like unto it, should be seen here and there in the world.

Have you faith in Christ? Then you have Christ. Christ is with you, and he is with you to be manifested. Christ is yours at a throne of grace. "I go unto my Father, and whatsoever ye shall ask in my name that will I do." Christ himself teaches you what to ask. The divine power that is offered you manifests itself first in combating and subduing all that is contrary to the Father's will in your heart and mind and life. You will surely not think of casting out devils from men possessed, while there remains in you so much that is pleasing to the devil. Christ is yours in his fulness of propitiatory power—your righteousness; but there still perhaps lingers in you some unabandoned relic of your own false righteousness; your faith

needs to grapple more fully and exclusively the merits of Christ's sacrifice. There is still perhaps a clinging to some earthly provision, some earthly treasure, a reliance upon some earthly weapon with which you are to fight the difficulties of the future : this may not be ; be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, which will never leave you nor forsake you. Christ will abide in your heart by faith. This is what faith means. But if he is to abide there, anger, selfishness, pride, covetousness, vanity, how can these abide there ? You are to walk as he also walked ; do you ? Nothing else may properly be called the life of faith. Does the word of God dwell in you richly, in all wisdom ? Are you led by the Spirit of God ? Do you daily take up your cross to follow Jesus ? Are you instant in prayer ? The reason why I ask these questions is because faith in Christ is an appropriation of Christ, and I would take the measure of your faith by taking the measure of Christ in you.

Christ did many mighty works that compelled men, even his enemies, to say, This is the finger of God ; works that carried conviction to their hearts, if they did not wring confession from their lips. Not that he did them every day, every hour ; we read of just three whom he raised from the dead. But testimony was given to men, of a kind they could appreciate, that the power of God was with him. "As the Father hath sent me into the world, even so have I sent you into the world." An ambassador is sent with credentials such as are fitted to be understood by those to whom he is sent ; Christ came with such ; there was testimony from heaven that he was from heaven. And so Christ sends his servants into the world, furnished with credentials such as

are fitted to carry conviction to the world. "These," it was said of the apostles, "are the servants of the Most High God, making known the way of salvation;" and this is what men should say of the messengers of Christ in our own days; for Christ is with his people always, even unto the end of the world, and heaven and earth may pass before one jot or tittle of his word.

But where are those mighty works? and those mightier works? Is there no more unbelief to be overcome? Is the battle fought and won? Is heathenism at an end? Has Mohammedanism retired from the field? Have the various delusions that call themselves Christianity abandoned their hold of the hearts of men? Have the sceptics ceased to doubt and the scoffers to scoff? Alas! no; these forces are found in full array on the battle-field of the world; and the questions resolve themselves into this: Where is that mighty power of Christ that is promised to faith?

Who shall answer this question? The responsibility of answering it is with the believer. What hinders you, O believer, from giving the world the evidence of Christ's omnipotent presence with you? Is it the idea that Christ is now unwilling to do these mighty works? This idea is of course sufficient to hinder the exercise of that faith which has the promise of the power. But is this idea well founded? Is not the promise of the text intended to combat it?

One more question. Have you appropriated all that power of Christ that you acknowledge to be available?

'Verily, verily I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.'—JOHN XVI. 20.

THE hour was now at hand when Jesus was about to enter into that great agony which had been distinctly before him ever since he had entered upon his ministry, and to which he had made from time to time ominous reference; the hour of the power of darkness; the baptism of anguish wherewith he was to be baptized; the tribulation through which he was to pass to the crowning tribulation and humiliation of the cross; the great and terrible eclipse which his glory was to undergo; the obscuration of the Sun of Righteousness; the spoliation of the King of glory. The hopes and machinations of his enemies among the Scribes and Pharisees, the Herodians and Sadducees, the lawyers and elders, the priests and princes, were to be crowned with a victory that they had scarcely dared, in their most sanguine moments, to anticipate. They were actually to get the upper hand of Jesus of Nazareth; not by force but by surrender; he with all his Divine powers was to pass into their absolute power, and all his influence over the people was to be crumpled up like a piece of worthless paper, so that men should stand still and see them accomplish all they wished without a thought of interposition. The accumulated treasures of their malevolence, baffled and thwarted during all these years by the irresistible ascendency of his character, his words and his

works, were to be poured fully out on his unprotected head. He was to be a defenceless lamb in their hands, a speechless, passive lamb. They were to be allowed to show him to men as a deceiver, an impostor, a blasphemer, a felon; to mock him, spit upon him, smite him, scourge him, strip him, and crucify him in the company of notorious malefactors. The prince of the power of the air was to obtain his desire, and have entire control (more complete even than his control over the ancient servant of God, righteous Job) over the Son of God, who had presumed to lift up a banner against the empire of the god of this world. All this anguish and agony, and wrath and humiliation, and darkness and laceration, and defeat and extinction, all this complicated horror was before Jesus, and yet he occupies himself in this parting scene with his disciples, with the suffering which *they* were to experience! Herein is love. Having loved his own in the world, he loved them unto the end; up to the very moment when he passes into the hands of his enemies, he concerns himself solely about his disciples! Look through all the loving words of these divine chapters, and see how he occupies himself solely with them and their needs and their difficulties. When he thinks of his own tremendous overthrow, his solicitude is for the way in which they will be affected by it. "Ye shall weep and lament, ye shall be sorrowful;" this is the picture which fixes his gaze, and this is the catastrophe under which he wishes to sustain them so far as may be. There is indeed a brighter picture beyond, and he wishes much that they could have faith to look to it in the hour of their dismay and grief. If they could only carry with them to

the scene of their great defeat and their enemies' triumph the assurance that the defeat was only temporary, only apparent, and that in fact it was simply a means of purchasing such a world-wide and glorious victory as eye had not seen or heart conceived, then indeed they would have been mightily sustained under the burden of sorrow. But the present has a power which the future cannot touch. The mother knows, when the pangs of parturition come upon her, that a child is to be born into the world; but the joy of that future belongs to the future, the pangs of the present have the mastery; the sufferer may be so mastered by the suffering that no anticipation of joy can for the time find any place. Thus would it be with the disciples when they should see their Divine Master pass along his Via Dolorosa to Golgotha, the place of skulls. What could their poor faith do in the hour when Jesus, with a great cry, should give up the ghost and leave them but his dead crucified body? One fact would take possession of all the faculties of their souls, and darken the face of universal things; the fact that Jesus in whom they had so implicitly trusted was dead and gone. They had followed him confidently, believing that he would guide to the ivory palaces of Messianic glory, and just when their feet should be on the threshold of the heaven-descended mansion of the King of saints, the ground caves in, and they sink into a horrible pit, and see their jeering enemies gazing at them from the brink. With them indeed, in that horrible pit, are many precious words of the Saviour, assuring them that the hour of darkness, the night of misery shall pass, and something better than all their hopes dawn upon them. But unbelief has the

field to itself; and those very words that should be precious are simply agonising by the awful contrast which present realities offer.

But Christ's "verily" of the suffering and of the night is not more invincible than his "verily" of the joy and of the dawn. If their sorrow forbids them to remember the promises, their joy shall forbid them to remember the sorrow. It shall be joy that no man can take from them. Men have taken their Christ from them, and they seem to have lost him utterly; but their Christ shall arise again, and no man shall evermore have power to come in between them and him; he shall be theirs for ever, and joy shall be theirs for ever. Delivered from that horrible pit, what trial shall their faith need fear henceforward? They are prepared to face the Neros of the world, and all the power of the adversary.

'Verily, verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.'—JOHN XVI. 23.

THE night of sorrow should be succeeded by the upspringing of the Sun of Righteousness, the return of the Lord of Glory from his tomb, bringing with him, wonderfully enhanced in meaning, all those precious words of promise which had gone down with him into the region of the shadow of death. Their joy no man should take from them any more; man had been permitted to empty all the treasures of his malice upon the head of their Christ, and had nothing more that he could do against the Saviour; he

might indeed rage against the people of Christ and make havoc of their earthly portion; but the risen Jesus had all power in heaven and in earth, and would be with his people always even unto the end of the world, unto the very limits of their pilgrimage across the empire of the god of this world. Why then should their joy ever be taken from them? Brought again from the dead he would be more gloriously and effectually with them than he had been in the days of his personal ministry. Let the sheep but know that their shepherd has power over the wolf, and they are content. The disciples obtained this confidence in perfection only after the wolf had been permitted to do his utmost, and seemingly to triumph.

"In that day ye shall ask me nothing. Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Ask and receive, that your joy may be full. These things I have spoken in proverbs." The fulness of their joy was on the day of Pentecost. Till then there were scales on the eyes of their understanding. When Christ rose they rejoiced with exceeding joy. But the risen Jesus came and went; his visits were rare and brief; after a whole week they would see him for a quarter of an hour; and then there would be a longer absence. The mists of the future were very imperfectly dispelled. How were they to get the full benefits of Christ's resurrection? Formerly he went with them here and there among the people, and men saw his glory, and stood in awe. Now he visits them in a retired chamber, or in some secluded spot, and, so far as the world is concerned, it is as though Christ were yet in the tomb. If even at that time it was difficult for them to understand

the nature of the new dispensation, and the idea even suggested itself that they should go back to their former occupations, treating the whole ministry of Christ as a parenthesis, an unsolved enigma, how much more now, before his resurrection, would it be hard for them to understand the intimations of that future day? From the necessity of the case the words of Christ were proverbs to them, hard sayings, enigmatical utterances. "We cannot tell what he saith."

'In that day ye shall ask me nothing; ye shall ask the Father in my name, and obtain everything.' He had said before, 'My Father is greater than I.' Christ in his visible presence could only be with one company; let them be separated, and some would have him not. His disciples were scattered all over the land, in towns, villages, hamlets, on the sea, on land, on mountains, in plains, in the field, in the house. But every believer needed that Christ should be with him always; how else could he have fulness of joy? Here was a grand difficulty, and how it should be surmounted the disciples could not at that time see. On the day of Pentecost all became plain. Christ was no longer visible; he was at the right hand of the Father; but his friendship, his faithfulness, his grace, his power all were theirs, just as they had been, and far more fully. The divine power and wisdom and love of the Father, these were all theirs, and all were available at all times, in all places, through the mere name of their Christ. 'All that you have found in my personal presence, all and much more you shall find in my name. If twelve legions of angels are necessary for your protection and for the success of your mission, hesitate not to ask; the Father will give them when you

mention my name. As you believe in God, seeing him not, so are you henceforth to believe in me. I say not that I will pray the Father for you; do not suppose that there is a repugnance in the Father's heart towards you on account of your unworthiness which I am to overcome each time by urgent entreaty; the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me and believed that I came out from God. I came forth to you from God, and all the love which you have apprehended in me is the Father's love; believe in the love thus manifest in me, and appropriate it, and it shall never fail you.'

The promises of Christ are part and parcel of the institutions of Christ, and may not be separated from them. 'Ye are not of the world,' says Christ to his; 'I have chosen you out of the world, separated you from it, sanctified you, put my Spirit upon you, and given you my own very mission, that the mantle of office falling from me may be upon you.' Now what was Christ's mission? Salvation; the communication to men of all that would tend to their highest welfare. And this is the mission of his people. They are in the world to communicate to men the blessings of the true life, the riches of grace. The promises are an essential part of the equipment of Christ's Legion. The aim of his soldiers is not to make themselves comfortable, to get as much of earth's good and be shielded from as much earthly harm and loss as possible. It is more blessed for them to give than to receive. Having this sincere desire to be useful to their fellow-men, sincere, and not degraded by the leaven of a secret desire for applause, let them ask, and God will give them abundantly. Will he not give them peace, joy,

and power? Yes, but in His own way, by giving them the mind that was in Christ, so that they find their happiness in promoting that of others. But, alas! many of us come short of this Christ-like devotedness; we have not got rid of all forms of selfishness; we are but little constrained by this love Divine. Have we nothing to do with these promises? O yes, they are yours, that you may obtain by them that which you really need; separation from the world, deliverance from self, and, in one word, a truer knowledge of Christ, that you may be changed into his image. Ask and receive, that your joy may be full.

'Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.'—LUKE XXIII. 43.

THE word *paradise* had been used by the Septuagint for *garden* in designating the garden of Eden, and this was the sense with which the Jews were familiar in the days of Christ. A restoration to paradise would mean to their minds a restoration to the state of holy and blissful companionship with God, beyond the reach of all the ills that sin has generated in the world. Whether there was such a state of bliss for the departed spirit was a point denied by some, and questioned by many. Most of them could see only the earthly kingdom, in the future. At all events, the want of some more explicit teaching on the subject was felt. There was a need for life and immortality to be brought into far clearer light. In the nature of things our minds have great difficulty in apprehending the elements

of any condition that is quite foreign to their experience ; they demand that everything should be translated into language with which they are familiar, and this language necessarily suggests conceptions related to the things that are familiar. The sacred writers are obliged to put under contribution all the fair and precious things of earth, in the depicting of the place where God gathers his redeemed from all nations to see the glory of Christ : trees, fountains, streams, cities, palaces, gates, pearls, jasper, and all precious stones, gold, glass, thrones, crowns, white and shining robes, harps, vials, etc. etc. Paul was caught up into the third heaven, and saw things the utterance of which was not so much unlawful as impossible ; earth having no language suited to express them. Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, nor heart conceived the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. The pleasant things of earth may very poorly adumbrate the felicity that awaits the people of God. The very description given of the New Jerusalem forbids us to let our minds grasp it as literal and final ; gold that is transparent, for instance, is no more gold ; walls suggest the idea of limitation of liberty, and of danger round about. The very description bids us look beyond itself to that which eye hath not seen, and which the Spirit will reveal unto us even by the aid of the symbols used.

To the dying thief, Paradise would simply mean a place of purity, blessedness, and immortality, favoured with the presence of the Almighty and with that of the holy angels ; and the promise of Christ was to him an assurance that he would be there with him that very day. His petition was, " Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." He

believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and would come again some day to establish his kingdom among men. But Jesus meets his faith with a promise to take him to Paradise that very day. Absent from the body, he should be present with the Lord; and when Christ should come with ten thousand of his saints to subdue all things unto himself and unto the Father, he should be there.

Men were challenging Christ to come down from the cross and prove himself a Saviour; but he remained on the cross and proved himself a Saviour by taking the very thief that was crucified with him away to glory. The word which was despised and rejected by the distinguished men around the cross, was taken to heart by this poor malefactor, and found to be life, eternal life. Here we see what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward; nailed to the cross, his mere word proves a ladder of glory by which his companion on Calvary may ascend to the highest and brightest regions of blessedness.

But what a marvellous conception of Divine love was that which instituted at the cross itself, in the very hour of the crucifixion, a method of manifesting how the death of Christ was to become available! From all nations, tribes, and tongues, myriads of sinners come in their turn to the cross for life; and when they are there know not how they shall get it, till they see the thief on the adjoining cross take of the fountain before their eyes and live. Ten thousand ideas and imaginations of this world stand between the heart and the appropriation of the Divine life that is in Christ. What shall I do that I may inherit this eternal life? How long and how bitterly must I repent? How

long and how devoutly must I pray? How much must I know of the word of God? How far must I conquer the evil of my nature? How much goodness must I put on? How much substance must I give to the poor? The answer to all these profoundly difficult questions is given by the poor thief that hangs on the adjacent cross. These weighty problems, which all the wisdom of this world could never solve, are effectually disposed of by the dying criminal whose very name is unknown to us. Do you wish to know what salvation is, and how it is obtained? how you are to get for yourself the benefit of Christ's death? You have simply to take, *as you are*, the life that is offered you at the cross. Adam was sent forth from Paradise lest he should stretch forth his hand and take of the fruit of the tree of life, and live for ever. Had he stretched forth his hand and grasped the fruit, it would have detached itself from the tree as easily as the fruit of the forbidden tree: it had simply to be taken. But he was debarred it. Here you have the tree of life in the true and best sense, and no cherubim guard the way with fiery swords. Whosoever will may take. This fruit of life cannot be taken with the hand, it is taken with the heart. Lord (Lord of lords, though treated here as a worm), remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom! This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise. The poor man was being executed for his crimes, and felt that he was suffering justly, and that he needed a Saviour, even Jesus the Saviour, and without more ado, there and then, with all conceivable unfitness, he takes the life which Christ dies to bestow.

Perhaps there was never yet an evangelist so successful

as this dying thief. Thousands will point him out in Paradise as the one who showed them the way of life.

'Verily, verily I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.' —JOHN XXI. 18.

AN explanation of the words is given by the evangelist: "This spake he signifying by what death he should glorify God." And Peter seems to have so understood it; for presently he says, pointing to John, What about this one? Peter was very ready to ask questions, and they were not always the most pertinent. Jesus answered, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" Should I concede him that privilege, would that be a reason for thee to be the less content with the honour granted thee, the privilege of dying for me? Peter gives the merest glance at the boon bestowed upon him, and is all eagerness to know what his brother apostle is to get. Look well at what has been given thee, Peter. As Jesus, from the very outset of his ministry, foresaw the cross always before him, and knew that every step was bringing him nearer to it, so it was now the privilege of Peter to know that there was a cross before him. He should live many years, and should be enabled to continue steadfast, immovable in the work of the Lord, his treacherous nature should not get the victory over him, the

prophecy of his name should be fulfilled, he should be a living stone built upon the stone of life, the Rock of ages, and should seal the testimony of his prolonged discipleship by suffering crucifixion at the hands of Christ's enemies.

Jesus had seen fit to refer in a very solemn yet loving manner to the thrice-repeated sin of Peter by the thrice-uttered question, Lovest thou me? It was of the utmost importance that Peter should never forget how very near Satan had come to getting the complete mastery of him. The bond of faith that kept him in communication with Jesus was attenuated to a spider-thread, when he declared with imprecations, calling God to witness his lie, that he knew not Jesus of Nazareth. What a dreadful prospect opened before him, when he thought of going forth with such a nature to fight the battle of life! Jesus away in the heavens, how reasonably might the adversary expect, in some opportune hour, to break that spider-thread of faith! Would it help him in any way to forget that terrible lapse? Peter would fain forget it. He had wept bitterly; but his was not a nature that cared to carry such a burden; he needed to turn to something more cheering. Ah, Peter, forget that shameful hour at thy peril; whatever else thou forgettest, forget not this. The recollection of thy weakness shall be thy strength. Peter could not fail to see that our Lord had the thing in mind when he thrice asked him, Lovest thou me more than these do? 'These may forsake thee, I will not; my love to thee is such that I am ready to face the utmost hostility of man;' this was what he had said. What sayest thou now, Peter, of that love of thine? Is there not something better than saying? What thy Lord wants now

is not a declaration in words. We have had enough of this. 'Ah, if I only had some opportunity of proving my love, of doing or suffering for Christ. But alas! the opportunity is gone. Jesus has left the world, and the world has washed its hands of him and his. At rare intervals he reveals himself to us for a few minutes. The time has gone by when I could give him proof of my attachment. A glorious opportunity was given and shamefully let slip. Under the circumstances, what can I do better than try to forget my shameful fall?'

But this is thy mistake, Peter. Better opportunities of showing thy love to Jesus were never present. Dost thou not remember this word: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me?" There are many in all these villages, upon all these mountains, who have a faith in Jesus as feeble as thine lately was; the smoking flax is ready to be quenched; the bruised reed is ready to be broken; the tidings of the death of Jesus have carried confusion and dismay to their hearts; shall their poor faith go out in everlasting night? Have you not that which would prove an unspeakable consolation to them? Why should you not be telling them that the crucified Jesus is alive for evermore, that you have seen him, spoken with him? Go, feed his lambs. Though the great Shepherd is departing, there is for you, as for all the apostles, a shepherdship. He washed your feet the other day; you may not now wash his, neither may you, like Mary, anoint his head with precious ointment; but the way to his heart is before you; look after his scattered flock. 'Follow me. I have left you an example, and I commit to you my work.'

The last "verily, verily" flings itself over the entire life of Peter, and never leaves him till his breath leaves him. He had been willing to show his love to Jesus by dying for him, but had been taken in the trap of his own wretched selfishness. Well, he shall have this privilege; but only after he has had, through many years, the equal privilege of glorifying Christ by ministering to the flock of Christ. For thirty years or more death should have no power over him; he should be compassed about by the prophecy of Christ, so that his enemies should not prevail to take away his life; but he should not continue till the coming of Christ; others might indulge this hope, he could not. We find him at last writing in his Second Epistle, "Shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me."

"Thou wouldest not;" "thou wouldest;" the latter explains the former. Peter, when the time came for him to suffer, was not unwilling to die. Our Lord does not teach that he would die unwillingly; but simply that there would be a privation of liberty; he should be under the control of others. In his younger days he had liberty, with respect to men; he could gird his fisher's coat upon him and go a fishing without asking permission from men. But he should eventually fall into the hands of his enemies. The ordinary reader can see this, and there would be no occasion for mentioning it, if commentators had not a passion for obscuring that which is plain.

What effect did it have upon Peter, to know that he should endure unto the end? Did it make him careless? Some say that the doctrine of election, the belief

that one's salvation is assured, will have this effect. Yes, upon those who have no right to believe it. Peter lived a life of genuine consecration to Christ, seeking in all things to be holy as God is holy. And the elect, in like manner, make their calling and election sure. Their faith is not in a future Christ, but in a present One, making them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

'I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.'—Rev. i. 18.

Half a century had gone by since the previous Amen; and that half century had been as a thousand years with respect to the vastness of the chapter which had been introduced into the moral history of the world. The Amens of the Son of God had vindicated their divine power by doing greater works than he himself had done in the time of his personal ministry; by casting down the strongholds of Phariseeism and Sadduceeism, and setting up the kingdom of God among those who had crucified the Lord of glory; had given a shock that was felt to be fatal to the great Gentile systems in Greece, Rome, Egypt, and elsewhere, and had gathered men of all creeds and philosophies and nations and grades into a thousand churches distributed over the face of the known world; and had visited the Jewish nation with that terrible chastisement, the predictions of which were inserted in the very constitution upon which the nation was built, and which had become

sealed to them when they cried out, 'Upon us and upon our children be the blood of this Jesus.' One of those Amens, spoken while Jesus was still nothing more than the despised and rejected man of Nazareth, and while the hearts of the disciples were of such poor stuff as they proved to be when their Lord was arrested, had undertaken that the Gospel should be preached in all the world. Well, it had been fulfilled; but how much, that nothing human could overcome, had to be overcome before this Amen could be fulfilled! No Macedonian phalanxes or Roman legions, no Alexander or Cæsar, could have accomplished what these disciples of the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, had accomplished. But the Amen that had upheld and strengthened them, and given them these sublime victories, had, in the case of most of them, given way to the Amen that was commissioned to bring them to the presence of their King of glory, to the mansions which he had prepared for them. Peter and Paul, and James and other apostles, had gone to take their place among the multitude out of all nations standing before the throne. John was in the isle of Patmos, awaiting the time when he should glorify the Lord in his death.

"I am he that liveth." In him is life; life in the highest sense; the life of the life-giving God. The assaults made upon this life by the world which it came to bless, only showed the more signally its unconquerableness. The prince of this world hoped to extinguish it by the force of temptation. Men imagined that they had strangled it for ever upon the cross. The life that was in Christ could not die, as God could not die; when men imagined him

dying he said to the believing thief, This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise. There was indeed a mortality in him, and without this his life would not have become life-giving to us: "This is my body, which is broken for you;" but there was infinitely more than the mortality, even the life of God; and unless there had been this to give dignity to the death, this last would not have been redemptorial. 'I am he before whose cross you stood, with certain women and other disciples, and upon whose sorrows and disgraces you gazed with agony, remembering all the days in which I had been your companion and your leader, and all the hopes with which my words and deeds had inspired you, and lost in wonder at this strange and cruel dissipation of them; and I am he who arose from the dead, and appeared unto you, and left you not until you had learned to know me as ever present with you. I have brought back from the realms of death the very keys of death and of Hades. It was a small thing to visit them and return unscathed; it behoved your Christ to go there as a conqueror, and not to return without the tokens of victory. The empire of the dead yielded up to me its keys. When I gave you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, I assured you that the gates of Hades should not prevail against it. I have the keys of those gates. The prince of this world has filled his servants with wrath against my servants, and commissioned them to put them to death, and Hades has opened wide her mouth to receive them; but while I have the keys of death and of Hades, Hades is only Hades, and death is not death; for when the Crucified One shall appear in glory to the world, and celebrate his triumph over the grave, then shall

his faithful martyrs be seen with him in glory. 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave (Hades), where is thy victory?'

The word *Hades* simply means 'the *unseen* world,' and is used as comprehensively as our expression 'the other world,' and does not necessarily refer to a place of torment. When a man dies, his body returns to the dust; his spirit goes into the invisible world, and is not, so far as this world is concerned; at the resurrection, the spirit and the changed body return, and the man is come again relatively to this world. The intermediate state is therefore expressed by these two words, Death and Hades; and when the time comes for the intermediate state to cease to be, the representation is (Rev. xx. 14) that Death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire. To have the keys of death and hell is to have power over all that have passed away from the earth. "Thou hast given thy Son power over all flesh," says Christ in his address to the Father, John xvii. His power is not merely over those now alive, but over the departed. They that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, as Lazarus did, and shall come forth. We have therefore to do with One to whom all the past is present; on whose bidding wait all the generations of other days. The keys that hang at his girdle declare emphatically to us that our loved ones who are no longer with us are with him, and walk with him in white. As they slip from our loving grasp, the door of the unseen world is opened to them by him who has the keys thereof, and they find themselves in the ivory palaces, the mansions of delight prepared by Christ for all who love him.

'Surely I come quickly; Amen.'—Rev. xxii. 20.

God is about to close this great book of revelation, in the writing of which so many of his servants have been engaged through so many successive centuries. The last words of the Bible are falling from the pen of the inspired and beloved apostle. A solemn warning has just been recorded against all those who shall seek to cut off the people of God, or mankind at large, from the inspired Scriptures, or from any portion of them, or who shall seek to impose, as equal in authority to the Scriptures, words of their own; and thus a new indication has been given of that Babylon upon which the woes of the Apocalypse are to be executed. When we speak of Babylon, we need not let our minds go too far away; within the pale of what is called Protestantism we find too much of what is here indicated; too many who have laid what they call the axe of criticism at the root of many of the inspired writings, or who are seeking to pass off the inventions of men as of Divine authority. God knew well how men would deal with this crowning marvel of his condescension and love, the completion of the Divine Testaments; how, recovering gradually from their awe, and emboldened by its gentleness, they would take the Bible in hand, and gradually seek to drape it, and alter it, and modify it, and introduce into it their own ideas, and, in a word, accommodate it to their own fancies. The eighteen centuries that have gone by are a striking commentary upon these closing intimations. Up to this hour men have been

fighting with the Bible, and studying the art of neutralising what is most distinctive in it.

But the Book of Revelation does not close with these warnings. We hear the voice of the Son of God. He has just four words to say to his people, who are commissioned to obey, to defend, and to declare his words in the world. Are they words of farewell? Does he bid them rest satisfied with what they have known? Does he tell them that there is nothing in the future but what they can achieve for themselves? Does he say, Heaven has nothing more to give you? Are they to renounce the attitude of expectation? No. We are saved by hope. The God of the Church of Christ is the God of hope. As the Old Testament closed with intimations of the Messiah that should come into the world, so the New Testament closes with intimations of another advent of the Christ of God. And as under the former dispensation men prepared for the coming Messiah, not by turning their backs upon the Old Testament, but by searching it more carefully, and obeying it more implicitly, so we are notified that our desires for the appearing of the Lord of glory are to find expression in earnest, wise, and persevering endeavours to understand the Divine communications made in the Scriptures, and to be fully conformed to them. "Blessed," says our Alpha and Omega, Rev. xxii. 14, "are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." The city is the New Jerusalem that cometh down from God out of heaven; the gates are the gates of pearl; the tree of life grows by the river of the water of

life that flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. The blessed enter in by faith, but they enter in not without obedience. Thus, in all holy conversation and godliness, we are to look for and hasten unto the coming of the day of God, as Peter warns us. Blessed are they who are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb; and the bride, the Lamb's wife, is none other than the city whose light was like unto a stone most precious, which John saw (in his vision of the latter day) descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Find me therefore one who is most heartily and intelligently intent on getting the whole revealed will of God accomplished by him, whose pure and holy ambition it is that the word of Christ and the Spirit of Christ may have full sway in and through him, with entire crucifixion of his own nature, and you will have found me the man who, above all others, is hastening the coming of the Lord.

"Behold, I come quickly." 'How quickly? So quickly that you have no time to lose in doing the things which I have given you to do. Heaven and earth may pass away, but not one tittle of my word; my prophecies concerning the Church and her enemies must be fulfilled; my commission to preach the Gospel among all nations must be obeyed; my prayer for the union of my people must be their prayer and their desire and their whole-hearted aim. The bride must make herself ready. It is nothing in heaven that hinders my coming; when you marvel at the seeming delay, look around you and see how much of the appointed preparation has been neglected. In vain you say, Come, Lord Jesus,

come quickly, if you allow anything in yourself to block my way to the throne of your heart.' Would it be pleasant, at the coming of the Lord Jesus in glory, to find that some work which he had given to you, and to which he attached a very high importance, has been left undone by you, has scarcely been perceived by you as an obligation at all? The Lord Jesus would fain not have you covered with confusion in that supreme hour; he would not have anything to mar the joy of the meeting between you and your glorified Master; and when he says to you, "Behold, I come quickly," he would have you hasten to do his will in this and that neglected particular. You respond, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly," but the best way to make this response is by seeking, with all self-sacrifice, to have Christ formed in you, the Hope of glory; by seeking to live his own divine life, and be in the world as he was in it.

What is the meaning of the rapid movements of Divine providence which we are now witnessing? This shaking together of all the nations of the earth? This running to and fro; this deportation and migration of races; this wonderful interfusion whereby each country is representing herself in every other country? What is the meaning of these inventions and appliances whereby facilities of locomotion and communication are furnished, the very idea of which would formerly have savoured of the Arabian Nights? The prodigious increase of knowledge and of material comforts, so that the mechanic has as many books and as much furniture as a king would have had some centuries ago? The last two generations have seen more than twenty pre-

vious generations saw. A mighty impulse has been given to all parts of the world's machinery. What does it all mean? What are we hurrying to? The answer comes from above: "Behold, I come quickly!" O that we may hear the voice which thus speaks; and the Amen which seals it, and seals all the recorded words of Christ. Scoffers say, Where is the promise of his coming? they make a mock of his Amen; ah! he will come too quickly for them.

'These things saith the Amen.'—Rev. iii. 14.

We have now considered the Amens of Christ, sixty-two in number; and may appropriately, in conclusion, contemplate him as the Amen. Thus does he designate himself in the last of the epistles to the seven churches: "To the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the beginning of the creation of God."

Christ himself is the Confirmation and the Guarantee not only of all his own words, but of all the words of God. He himself is the faithful and true Witness of God to us, and of God in us. And he himself is (as it should be rendered) the head of the creation of God, supreme over all things. The first expression regards especially the past; the second regards the present; the third the future, looking forward to the time when "all enemies shall be put under his feet," when God "shall put all things in subjection under his feet." But in an important sense, the three ideas

are comprehended in the word Amen, since the word by which all the glories of the future are to be spoken into being is already uttered and sealed with the Amens of God.

Christ is the Amen with reference to the Mosaic law. He cheerfully and thoroughly fulfilled the law which the Jews found so burdensome, and which weighed so heavily upon their consciences; not according to the exposition of the Pharisees, but according to the requirements of God. And in his death-hour, on the cross, we hear him exclaim, It is finished. It had waited fifteen centuries for one who should honour it, and magnify it, and conclude it, and it found that one crucified at Calvary. He was the Amen to it; it found its satisfaction in him; and gave way for the higher dispensation of the will of God which regards all people and all ages.

Christ is the Amen with regard to the moral law broken by all mankind; the law that demands whole-hearted, unswerving, self-abnegating love to God and man. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God; far, very far short of it. But the god of this world failed to interrupt Christ in his divine progress through life, to make him stumble, or to turn him aside. He was in all things all that God required man to be; God's ideal of humanity was fulfilled in him; "this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;" he was "without sin, neither was guile found in his mouth;" thus he is the Amen, the consummation of that holy will of God which Adam violated.

Jesus is the Amen of all the prophecies given of old concerning the blessings to come upon the world through the seed of the woman. He is the Amen of all the prayers

breathed by holy men of old, of all their aspirations for the coming of the promised kingdom.

But Christ is no more to the world than he is to the individual soul. He does not deal with men in masses. He knocks at the door of every man. And whosoever opens to him, whosoever receives this Saviour, Christ becomes the Amen of that soul: "Know ye not that Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"

Well, let us look at this. How is Christ my Amen? or God's Amen to me?

He is the solution of all doubts. How many things seem strange in the word of God to the heart that has not been trained and nurtured in the school of God! How many things are contrary to all our experiences and to all that we have observed in the world! And how many things in the Scriptures seem not reconcilable with each other! How staggering it is to find that God is of such holiness that he cannot look upon iniquity without abhorrence, that heaven is a holy place where sin may not enter, that we are sinners, bound and fettered by sin, and incapable of delivering ourselves, and yet that God would not have us perish! We are utterly without righteousness, and yet without righteousness God will not receive us. Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God, that through Jesus Christ our Lord there is deliverance. The Amen comes to my heart, there to abide by faith. I have as it were a new white stone given me from heaven, with the ineffable name of God upon it. My doubts are dissolved; my fears are banished; the mystery is cleared up; the paralysis of sin no longer keeps me back

from the throne of God. "What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

What if Christ in the believer should be found the Amen of God to the world, the solution of the world's doubts? "I in them, and thou in me, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." What is the meaning of the marvellous promises and exhortations addressed to the believer in these seven epistles of the glorified Redeemer? What are we to make of such words as these: He that overcometh and keepeth my words unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, even the inflexible rod of God's truth? What is it to overcome in the sense here intended? This is nothing less than the Apocalypse, the revelation of Christ in the believer, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe. Well, are we competing for this prize?

Let me affectionately ask the reader of these meditations upon the Amens of Christ, whether he knows Christ as the Amen? What will it avail him to have heard and pondered the verily, verily of Christ, if Christ is not the Amen of God in his soul, the Confirmation and the Witness within him, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, by whom he has daily fellowship with the Father, in and through whom his prayers are answered, and who is to him the earnest of the inheritance to which he is looking and pressing forward?

He that receiveth him hath set-to his seal that God is true; and Christ is thus not only the Amen of God, but the Amen of the believer. The verily of God is met in him by the verily of the believer. Verily, says God in Christ; verily, says the believer in Christ; and thus we reach the full significance of the VERILY, VERILY of Christ.

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